



BLACK AND GREEN REVIEW

NO 2
FALL 2015

A black and white photograph of a forest scene. In the foreground, several large, gnarled tree roots are exposed on the ground, some branching out horizontally. In the background, several vertical tree trunks stand against a dark, shadowed area. The lighting creates strong highlights on the bark and roots, contrasting with the deep shadows.

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Photo by Yank.

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CONTENTS

1. Opening Editorial: Kevin Tucker
5. Greetings from John Zerzan
6. The Biggest Hearts: Natasha Alvarez

ESSAYS

8. Not So Close Encounters: John Zerzan
13. To Speak of Wildness: Kevin Tucker
33. *Inter-missions: The Unseen Light: Lincoln Finch*
34. Written in Stone: Four Legged Human

DISCUSSION

62. Stone Tools and Symbolic Thought: Cliff Hayes
65. News from Prehistory: John Zerzan
69. Subjects Object: Kevin Tucker
78. Why the Primitive Skills Movement is Failing Us:
Tamarack Song

FIELD NOTES FROM THE PRIMAL WAR

83. True Crime Case Files: Fiber Optic Cable Attack
85. Spawning Blooms, Spawning Extinction: Kevin Tucker
89. Losing Ground: Syria's Climate Nomads: Evan Cestari
95. *The Forest is Our Livelihood: Sofia Yu on the Fate of
the Penan: Kevin Tucker*
104. Field Work in the End Times, Part Two

REVIEWS

116. "To Our Friends" Reviewed by John Zerzan
117. Unavoidable Damage: A review of *Glass Cage & A
Deadly Wandering* by Steve Kirk
122. Entering an Era of Consequences: A review of
American Exodus by Four Legged Human

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Turkey Vulture. Photo by Yank.

Sometimes green isn't always good.

The weather around me has been unpredictable at best throughout the spring and summer of this year. That is unquestionably a part of the larger destabilization of weather patterns that we've seen mounting since agriculture and industrialism arose. But we are now in overdrive.

The spring rains barely came. Foliage was both stunted and delayed or, in some cases, seemingly non-existent. Drought like conditions in the Northeastern United States might have missed the headlines, but it was only because they were eclipsed by raging wildfires along the West Coast, a burning boreal forest, and prolonged, epic drought, not surprisingly, preceding the fires. Not making headlines, however, doesn't change the reality on the ground.

Decreasing winter snow pack, irregular precipitation, storms that are more abrupt and forceful simply run off of parched, denuded lands; bodies of water become isolated and their flows disrupted. Deprived of rain, ponds, creeks, and lakes wane. This spring I witnessed many of them vanish.

Riparian ecology is relatively delicate. The symbiotic relationships surrounding them are tightly wound around what is essentially an ecosystem in fragments: a balance based on movement, on flowing water, on the slow and continual nourishment of constant replenishment at times seeming to go on forever. Stagnancy brings demise.

When you look across the late summer fields, it has become a sea of green and often overheated amber. Cattails are gone. The songs of green frogs are muted. The sight of elder snapping turtles becomes in-

creasingly rare. The water has largely vanished, overgrown with grasses. The landscape where water had spent decades crossing the soil just looks like divots without causation.

The majority of the human body is comprised of water. It is our lifeblood. It allows us to live. But it is more than that. Water, in its existence and movement, is a reflection of ourselves: it thrives in flowing movement. It is the embodiment of resilience: water will always strive to find a way to get where it needs to be. Hurricanes, tsunamis, flooding, and even mold are all evidence of this. Water is a force to be reckoned with.

Like water, our resilience comes from movement. Our patterns leave room for change and degrees of deviation, but there are certainties as well; without rain, the waters stagnate. Patterns can shift, but patterns must remain.

Things are heating up, both literally and figuratively. Water is a resource that we largely take for granted. Yet much of the world wars over water rights without delusion. Drought adds kindling to areas already torn by oil wars. Food scarcity and rising food costs echo into political and social uprisings. Segments of the Earth are torn by increasing political instability and the unilateral response of military force has not nor will not resolve those tensions. This couldn't be any clearer than the current flood of Syrian refugees as they move through Europe.

These are refugees of an instable and unsustainable climate. As goes the ecological climate, so goes the political and social ones. Tensions will continue to mount. Socio-political infrastructures will tighten their grip to attempt to divert the uncontrollable. The wildness of our body and spirit flows. Like water, it will find a way. Dams will burst. Barriers will fall and paths will divert.

What we have learned from the story of the human being is that our being lies in and was carved by our resiliency. The lifeway of the nomadic hunter-gatherer is etched into our biology, into our minds. Like all wild beings, we are able to adapt, sometimes to a fault. But there are limits. We need movement, we need flow, and we need ecological sanity.

If we can say anything of certainty about the crises that we now face it is that we live in uncertain times. But there's a catch to that. We still have something. We have knowledge about how humans have thrived, about conditions under which humans have suffered, about the systems that have stilled our movements and built barriers. The wildness that has always guided our paths remains. Even if buried and misdirected, our resiliency still struggles.

The landscape of Modernity leaves little room for optimism. In light of the universality of the crises that we face, hope seems like the last vestige of naivety. And it certainly can be. But the history of civilization has its counter-narratives in struggles against it. As John Zerzan points out in the title essay of his new book, *Why Hope? The Stand Against Civilization* (out now from Feral House), hope can stand against all reason: "it is possible. Our overcoming the disease of civilization is in no way guaranteed, obviously, but clearly it is possible." (Pg 134)

In uncertain times, the only certainty is that stagnancy assures death. We need movement. The hyper-domesticated technological vortex that we are continually drawn into bolsters our barrier. It allows us to feel removed from consequence, to feel as though we can have our critiques and that is enough. As society turns further towards technology, using social networks for our interactions, our stagnancy turns into rot. Our continued usage of these predatory platforms confirms our complacency.

Black and Green Review, to me, represents an attempt to reground the green anarchist, anarcho-primitivist, and anti-civilization milieu in movement. We don't just need the discussions, we need to have them in ways that matter. The reason we focused so heavily on technology in the first issue is that it is the elephant in the room. Until we begin addressing the neurological and social effects of the Interface Revolution, then no discussion can cut through those levels of entrenched domestication. It simply became impossible to address what has happened to this milieu and to further these critiques without drawing that out first.

The response has been good, but the response has been slow. These aren't the times to get a physical publication up and running as even long-standing publications like *Earth First! Journal* are finding themselves raising printing costs with every issue. The medium that predominates offers immediate gratification, the ability to just click, like, share and comment on the most radical article of the minute without consequence. And, as we discussed repeatedly in issue one of *BAGR*, those things are all happening without absorption.

It is the thoughtless integration of technology into our lives that shows its power. We live in the era of overwhelming distraction. It is easy to go along with it. In many ways, to exit the social networks is to cut yourself off from friends and family. But we need to understand that having a critique of technology, of civilization, does not make any of us exempt from its implications.

And so we are trying to rebuild and expand on where things were.

Hark back to recent memory when the discussion on pages was followed with campfires and burning infrastructure. We have a hurdle before us, but we have to find our way back to that place.

I have heard that *BAGR* has helped some of those conversations again. I've been part of some great ones myself. I've heard from old friends and taken part in long standing arguments. I hear rumblings. Things might be moving slow, but good things often do. It takes a lot of work, it might not lead us to where we need to go, but I know nothing different than to continue that struggle and to push in this direction.

In dismal times like these, it is projects like this, and, more importantly, the conversations and connections that result from them that give me a reason for hope. Given time, civilization will collapse under its own weight. That process has already begun. But every bit of resistance brings that time closer.

And I welcome it with loaded arms.

This issue deals with numerous topics, but what you see in these pages is the result of many of those conversations that I mentioned. The editorial processes behind *Black and Green Review* are arduous. In order to have these discussions, to push this critique and to develop praxis, we need to continually challenge each other and ourselves. Behind these essays are in depth and often contentious discussion about things like the nature of symbolic thought, the consequences of delayed return in minutiae during the Upper Paleolithic, the depths of interspecies communication, and the biological implications of being a wild being stuck in Modernity.

As an editor, I take pride in the level of energy that the other editors have brought on board. It has taken a lot of work pulling this together, but I hope that you will find something in it that resonates or causes a response. These aren't easy discussions, but they are necessary ones.

I'd like to formally welcome John Zerzan and Evan Cestari on as editors. Both have been vital since the inception of this project and, in many ways, I see *BAGR* as the response to discussions that John and I had been having since the last issue of *Green Anarchy* came out.

In addition, Four Legged Human's 'Written in Stone' is in part a response to Cliff Hayes' 'Stone Tools and Symbolic Thought', but unquestionably belongs in the essays section.

We hope that what we've put together for you will inspire and incite. And we thoroughly welcome response.

For wildness and anarchy,
Kevin Tucker

GREETINGS FROM JOHN ZERZAN

As the crises of late civilization multiply and deepen, some are opting out. Rather than try to deepen their understanding of what's going on and why, they have, in various ways, declared Game Over.

Militant environmentalist Guy McPherson, for example, has recently thrown in the towel. Nothing can any longer be done to avert catastrophe, Case Closed. The once somewhat anti-civ Derrick Jensen has become a progressive, who focuses his venom on transgender folks and anarchists.

Speaking of anarchists, of whom much may once have been expected, they are now so often engaged in various kinds of irrelevant rhetoric that does not get beyond the Left or oppose civilization. Nihilists and egoists, for instance, continue to show little or no interest in learning from indigenous people, past or present. Ancestral ways, ties to the land, that could be life-giving to a culture of resistance.

BAGR is a different matter, engaged in analysis and alternatives so critically needed. We feel that it is essential to come to grips with civilization and its driving logic, domestication. The dominant order is certainly lethal but it is also much more transparently without answers to the mounting devastation it produces on every level.

BAGR probes the riches available, the inspirations, the arsenal of weapons to bring to bear against civ. Every previous civ has failed, this now universal one is so visibly failing. We can surrender or we can go forth, armed and ready.

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Black and Green Review

PO Box 832

Ephrata, PA 17522

blackandgreenreview@gmail.com

<http://www.blackandgreenreview.org>

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THE BIGGEST HEARTS

Natasha Alvarez

Today I was reminded of something again and again.

You would think that the people fighting against the culture of destruction would be an angry sort. You'd think maybe they'd be serious all the time, or mean all the time, or mad all the time. Or hard to get to know, or unfriendly.

But in fact it's the exact opposite.

This rebellion is being led by the ones with the biggest hearts. The ones who love the most, the ones who give their babies millions of kisses, and snuggle with their dogs, and cry over the beauty of the full moon with the cicadas singing.

This rebellion is being led by the ones who tell stories and jokes, cook delicious dinners, know the names of all the plants, and talk to the trees.

This rebellion is being led by people so in love with this world they would stop at nothing to save it, protect it, and defend it.

This rebellion is being led by the ones connected to the land, the ones who listen, the ones who know, or have remembered, the ancient languages, of water, of wind; of plants, and animals.

This rebellion is being led by the ones with the biggest hearts.

And we are alive, and we are in love, and we are winning.

Natasha Alvarez is the author of *Liminal: A Novella*, published by Black and Green Press in 2014.

Photo by Yank.

ESSAYS



Dragonfly. Photo by Yank.

NOT SO CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

DISTANCED IN THE AGE OF AUTISM

JOHN ZERZAN



Photo by Yank.

For about a century, scientists have known that all of the galaxies are flying apart from each other, which may be a very apt metaphor for our epoch of social existence. We are hurtling away from each other in a kind of explosion, but our universe, unlike the physical one, is contracting, not expanding.

We are outdistancing—and impoverishing—the natural world as we ride along on a terrible voyage of distancing. The word distance means a stance or standing apart or away. The historical development of civilization and Enlightenment goes on and on, but where are the promised emancipations, where is a basis for community? Instead there is separation, remoteness and their consequences. As philosopher Bruce Wilshire asked, “At the time of the so-called triumph of the West, why do so many people feel so crappy, so lonely, so abandoned?”¹ Health professional John G. McGraw added that “loneliness and other negative states of aloneness can pathologize people,”² a phenomenon we see, for example, in growing random violence. “No sense of direction, we Americans./ No place to go,” wrote Carolyn Kizer.³

Distanced, apart, as we so steadily seem to be, a sense of unreality takes hold. In the functional society of technology, dysfunctional behaviors and conditions abound. Even the incidence of Alzheimer’s at ever earlier ages is implicated, as a function of loneliness.⁴ In 1991 Daniel Goleman addressed “dissociative disorder”—a malady of growing prominence, the third most common psychiatric disorder after anxiety and depression: the feeling that one is an automaton.⁵

The social world is fragmented and there is indeed a worrying trend towards greater fragility and emotional instability. The most severe example is likely autism, for which the prevalence estimates have risen almost exponentially.⁶ If the capacity for empathy is a defining feature of human relationships, autistic individuals are more or less cut off from the human experience. Characteristically, they don't like to be touched. Autism literally means "self"-ism and is an inability to form affective, emotional contact with others, living in "a world in which they have been total strangers from the beginning."⁷ A remarkable parallel, on a deeper level, with the fact that recent decades have witnessed a striking diminution of contacts with friends and neighbors.⁸

Autism has been described as a marked exaggeration of masculine traits. Heavily affecting males over females, it strongly values systemization, not empathy, and engages with reality minus social interaction. Obsessive, rote behavior (e.g. strict attachment to routines) mimics the high-tech culture, which of course is also a male domain. Temple Grandin, herself autistic and probably the most well-known writer on the subject, has said there would be no Silicon Valley without folks from various parts of the autism spectrum.

These few lines don't even scratch the surface of the reality of the topic. Stuart Murray, who is both parent and healer, observes that "We might care less about causes if we knew exactly what it means to live with autism."⁹ As Clara Park put it, "Autism is when your two-year-old looks straight through you to the wall behind."¹⁰ But causes should not be cavalierly dismissed or attributed summarily. Park goes on to refer to how autism "is now almost universally recognized" as the result of genetics, viral infection, and/or unknown biological agents.¹¹ Very often what is "universally recognized" misses the point completely and is a matter of ideological bias rather than reality.

To confine causation to personal physiology masks what underlies the terrible condition of autism. Environmental degradation and alienation at least as massive are obvious dynamics. Liah Greenfeld's *Mind, Modernity, Madness*¹² argues persuasively that such diseases are culturally caused, that "our inability to cope with [modern] complexity makes us mad."¹³ Meanwhile it should come as no surprise that the purveyors of techno-complexity will not see what is right in front of them, even when they provide the evidence. "The Mystery of Autism" is an anonymously penned offering in the December 18, 2014 issue of *MIT Technology Review*, announcing perplexity as to why autism is so prevalent. The article's key graphic shows that 1 in

68 in the U.S. are so afflicted, 1 in 55 in Japan, 1 in 52 in South Korea, and so on, vs. much lower incidences in countries that are much less high tech. The correspondence is not at all perplexing, but is in fact inescapable. Alexander Durig's *Autism and the Crisis of Meaning*¹⁴ puts the connection in unmistakable terms: autism and a wider, societal meaninglessness both follow from postmodern technological society.

Our species is being steadily reconfigured away from humanness toward machine-being, a move of space-time distancing to somehow escape or transcend humanity. Now we can—must?—experience “cyberian apartness,” “intimacy at a distance,” “detached attachment,” and the rest, with the weak and shallow ties inherent in this disembodied zone. Mediated quasi-interaction, essentially non-reciprocal. Atrophy, apathy, cynicism, awaiting robotic companionship, already in place for various Asian elders. A wave of virtualization is taking place, where the Web is increasingly treated and experienced as a real place. Where life retreats, screen-deep, in its “relationships.” More and more time online, more depression and boredom.

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Raoul Vaneigem referred to the infamy of exchange involved in pushing a coin across the bar. Now we see even that escaping; let's go out to order and pay by touch screen. No human contact at all. Jacques Ellul saw this coming as early as the '80s: “Real meetings will become rarer than ever. We will see one another only by way of machines.”¹⁵

To be distanced is to “lose touch.” The first sense to develop, touch is “our most fundamental and complete sense since it allows us to distinguish between an object and its image copy,” notes Alan Kirby.¹⁶ “Haptic” technology has already replicated the sense of touch, in yet another bid to take us away from the directly experienced. Less abstractly, bumper stickers that ask “Have you hugged your child today?” are disappearing, as parents become wary of touching their own children.¹⁷ We are also distanced from what produces the distancing. The unfamiliar, somewhat uncanny devices with screens are hidden from us, not experienced. To be intimate, to be present with

this earth is a challenge; we cannot ignore all that bars that possibility. The challenge has to do with our senses, starting with touch. The world's least tactile people, Americans among them, are the most technologically oriented. Seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching are all on their way to becoming digitalized, computer-designed processes, in flight from the sensual world, from the "animal" life of the body.

The texture of living has joined the exodus of meaning and the motion of the catastrophic nature of modernity presents itself. In 2011 Anders Breivik killed 8 people with a bomb, then massacred 69 at a Norwegian youth camp. The novelist Karl Ove Knausgaard, meditating on this horror, concluded that there must be a distance that makes such acts possible. A distance that "has appeared in the midst of our culture. It has appeared among us, and it exists here, now."¹⁸

"It is difficult to argue against the fact that our twenty-first century has witnessed the emergence of a different breed of human beings under the sign and aegis of the information age," as Paul Jahshan saw it.¹⁹ Twenty years earlier, a character in Paul Auster's dystopian novel *In the Country of the Last Things* phrased it more darkly: "Life as we know it has ended, and yet no one is able to grasp what has taken its place."²⁰

But obviously, none of it happened overnight. Dying horn strains in Schubert's *Winterreise* (Winter Journey) evoke absence and loss, what has passed away, in a world lost to industrialism. Far earlier than any Romantic motif are the distancing mechanisms of civilization's domesticating pulse and instrumental reason. A distant promise that eluded Melville's Ahab and Fitzgerald's Gatsby is now gone, and we are left distanced from ourselves, addicted to diversions and breathing an ever thinner and more troubled air.

Other animals embody a horizon of truth that we, who are not the only animals who mourn, are losing. At the time of a radical eclipse of nature itself—and much else—we need to remember place and particularity. Philosophy is a meditation of place, even though under massive assault by placelessness. Distancing is allowed only as a necessary protection against the force of the very distancing we need to combat. Only that much detachment.

ENDNOTES

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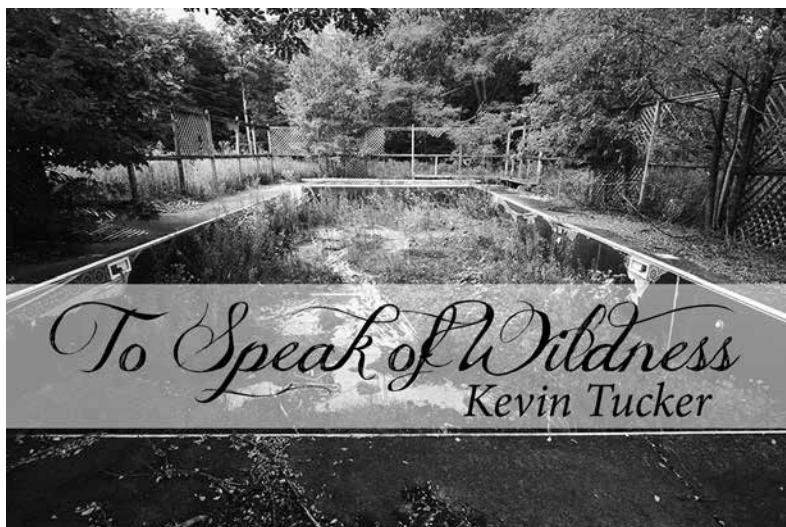
17 Tiffany Field, *Touch* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 5.

18 Karl Ove Knausgaard, "The Inexplicable," *The New Yorker*, May 25, 2015, p. 32.

19 Paul Jahshan, *Cybermapping and the Writing of Myth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 3.

20 Paul Auster, *In the Country of Lost Things* (New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 20.





Overgrown pool. Photo by Yank.

"He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world, that he was set on this world as a stranger."¹

- Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature*

"It is not inherently in the nature of the world that it should consist of things that may or may not be appropriated by people."²

- Tim Ingold

The memory is vivid.

It was nighttime and the sky had been dark for hours. My wife and I were driving on a stretch of road, cars were clustered, but it was neither busy nor desolate. There was some space between the cars ahead of us, but a good number of cars following. And then there was a sudden, unmistakable flash of white dotted with brown. It moved quickly and it was gone. Had we blinked, we could have easily missed it entirely.

Neither of us blinked. We knew immediately that what had flown feet in front of our windshield was a Great Horned Owl. There was a stillness to it, as if it all happened in slow motion. Even with a decent amount of traffic, that owl had flown in front of our car only.

And this wasn't the only time. It wasn't the first and it certainly

wouldn't be the last, yet this time there was no question: the owl wanted to be seen.

Owls are often solitary animals. As someone who has dedicated a fair amount of time to tracking them, I can assure you of this. There are some variations to that. Barred Owls can be downright social. We have had them swoop in over fires just to inspect.

This, however, is far from the norm.

Owls are as excellent at camouflage as they are hunting carried out with a nearly imperceptible hush to their flight. Even expert owl trackers who literally wrote the book on the subject, Patricia and Clay Sutton, observed that "it is amazing how [owls] can seem to simply not exist until the perfect angle makes one visible." This doesn't change the fact that despite their invisibility, owls "are all around us."³

When an owl wants to be seen, it is awe-inspiring. An extremely different feeling than the joy of finding Great Horned Nestlings or catching the flash of Screech Owl eyes as light crosses thickets at night. For us, that flood of feeling is always eclipsed by one thought in particular: confirmation. The Great Horned Owl is our messenger of death.

When death comes for a relative, a friend, an acquaintance of those close to us, there can be heaviness in the air that is inexplicable otherwise. Things feel off. My wife and I have regrettably become accustomed to it over the years. We start doing a mental inventory of whom we know that might be going through some turmoil or difficulty. But when the Great Horned Owl shows herself, little doubt remains: something has happened.

The night that stood out so clearly in my memory stands out because it was the time when the rational, domesticated part of my brain broke down. When the probability of coincidence was worn too thin and the veneer cracked. There is something here. Sure enough, we found out fairly quickly that there had been an accident. A family member had been involved in a fatal collision. While he was revived on the scene, the driver was not. That happened nearly 1,000 miles away and at the same time the owl came.

This was nearly 12 years ago now. Circumstances changed, but the Great Horned has come numerous times. As grandparents passed, as relatives took their own lives or succumb to cancer or diabetes, as family and their acquaintances overdosed; every time, we get the news from this majestic winged hunter.

The silent flier speaks up.

That night opened a door of perception that I had only casually noticed before. The Great Horned was a messenger of death, but there were many others. There was a distinct air of familiarity and comfort in the Mockingbird that sat on my grandfather's casket during his funeral and watched silently. A Rattlesnake made themselves known to indicate that a family member had died from heroin overdose, a fitting messenger for having injected too much venom. A calming White Tailed Deer that stood before me as I nervously wondered about my as-yet-unborn daughter. And there was a Flycatcher screeching outside of our home to warn us about an instigator amongst us.

"These messengers don't come because you seek them; it is not their purpose to serve you. They are simply doing what they do: responding with empathy to impulses that are more apparent to them than to us. That we are continually missing such messages is on us, our own aloof non-presence in the world."

Mullien. Photo by Yank.



These messengers were there all along; I just hadn't put the pieces together. I still feel discomfort even speaking of them openly, but I cannot deny them. And I am only scratching at the surface here.

Seeking council from the wild isn't a matter of being fully integrated into the world around you. These messengers don't come because you seek them; it is not their purpose to serve you. They are simply doing what they do: responding with empathy to impulses that are more apparent to them than to us. That we are continually missing such messages is on us, our own aloof non-presence in the world.

This isn't meant to downplay the breach of any civilized social contract that is happening when wild beings are bringing news, warnings and offering direction. Considering our sanitized sense of intellectual superiority and deadening of senses, it's not surprising to know that something like Laurens van der Post's account of a hunter-gatherer of the Kalahari telling him: "We Bushman have a wire here; he tapped his chest, 'that brings us news'"⁴ is interpreted as evidence of telepathy. Anything other than pure supernatural power is unthinkable.

That the world speaks to us shouldn't be news. The Lakota-Sioux Lame Deer echoes the word of indigenous peoples the world over with statements like this: "You have to listen to all these creatures, listen

with your mind. They have secrets to tell. Even a kind of cricket, called *ptewoyake*, a wingless hopper, is used to tell us where to find buffalo.”⁵

The writing is in the thickets and the cracks in the wall, yet this isn’t the headline. To get messages from wild beings is tantamount to pleading insanity in this society. But those messages are always there. What keeps us from receiving them is our own ability to perceive that they exist.

Perception and the Better Angles of our (Human) Nature

*“In spite of our precious rational process and in spite of our cherished scientific objectivity, we continue to maintain an absolute and unchallengeable distinction between man and the nonhuman. It has occurred that the firmness of this insistence may be one measure of the need we may perceive for justification of our overwhelmingly antibiotic actions.”*⁶

- John Livingston, *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation*

And here lies the root of our problem: the process of domestication, the taming of our wild souls through constant programming, can only exist in a dead world. The world that makes our existence possible is flattened, dissected and reassembled as a sum of all parts.

Our compliance is built upon an uprooted lack of place. We are aliens in our own home. Our virtues and pride are built around artificial replacements for community, for a sense of being, for a sense of belonging, and an amplified sense of self. Domestication is the process of stunting the growth and relationships that our hunter-gatherer minds and bodies require and redirecting those impulses to productivity. Our entire sense of identity is built upon *neotony*, an incomplete process of personal development within the greater community against a backdrop of living remembrance and myth.⁷ Psychologically speaking, we are runts.

Our senses are dulled, the instincts that we possess as children are subdued. Our world is flattened. As the anthropologist Colin Turnbull observed in comparing the stages of “the human cycle” between hunter-gatherers and Modernized consumers: “if in our childhood and adolescence we have not learned other modes of awareness, if we have not become fully integrated beings, and if we persist in dissociating reason from these other faculties, these other modes of knowing and understanding, then we remain fettered by the limitations of reason and cease to grow.”⁸

We absorb the fears of the farmer, politician, priest, and industrialist. We regurgitate them so that we can find some solace in their hollow promises. We build cities, countrysides, nuclear power plants, and open pit mines upon that foundation. We volunteer in the war against our own animality.

And all the while, these wild beings are constantly reminding, warning and telling us what our bodies and hearts know: we are connected. There is something here. A message lost as owl carcasses pile up on the sides of highways: we are born wild. And to our would-be messengers, we still are. We just aren't recognizing it.

This is wildness. Yearning. Reaching. Crying out and carrying on. And the blood of the messengers is on our hands.



Our perception of the world is fickle. Our subjective experiences can turn into self-sustaining feedback loops that only serve our own ideological biases. Biases crafted and sold to us by programmers, priests, and salespersons. But the world is more than that.

The world, to put it simply, exists.

Wildness exists.

It exists in its own right, comprised of billions upon billions of living beings. Physical separation may be real, but the stoic independence that the domesticated uphold is a fragment of our own fractured minds. A blinder: a limitation.

We look into a mirror of the isolated soul of a civilized being, a consumer of life, and subject the world to the distortions that we carry.

We unload our burdens onto that barren soil, onto “nature”. It too must feel our loneliness, our isolation. Our wanting.

There is much to be said about the importance of critique. My short sell on anarcho-primitivism (AP) is that it is a critique with implications. And those implications are things that I don’t take lightly.

The AP critique is a short hand way of saying that civilization is killing the earth and that the domestication process is perpetually taking its toll on our lives in every sense of the word. Most importantly, the AP critique is saying that civilization, the culture of cities, doesn’t arrive out of thin air. There are roots here. To understand how we’ve gotten to this point, we must dig.

And so we dig.

The crisis we face is an old crisis, going back in some places nearly 12,000 years. That is literally to the beginning of History. In ecological time, that’s a drop in the bucket. Fortunately, as wild beings, our roots lie in ecological cycles, not linear time. Our roots go deep. Infinitely deep. We, human beings, are the slow outgrowth of millions of years of wild existence. It would be easy to regurgitate the narrative of Progress that our presence indicates a tooth-and-nail conquest of a world that is both Social Darwinian and Hobbesian in nature.

But we know this isn’t the case. Our development as a species has been relatively slow and stable. Our timeline for the antiquity of stone tools pushes back continually and is largely fogged by the inability to admire the ingenuity of our grounded ancestors and cousins. We *want* to believe that things have gotten better, that *we* have improved. Yet this isn’t true. All of the psychological and physical breakdowns of the human body and mind are an indicator that as adaptive as humans are, we can’t tolerate the domestication process and the reality it has created. This only becomes more increasingly apparent.

In short, the implication here is that we are not starting from scratch.

We are not born with the *Tabula Rasa*, the “clean slate”, that Plato and his predecessors had described. Philosophy, an indicator of our trained disconnect with the world around us, has always been a crucial tool of programmers and specialists alike. We are wild beings: each and every one of us. The AP critique is about understanding how changes in circumstance (specialization, surplus orientation, agriculture and pastoralism, sedentism; to name the primary culprits) created the vestiges of social power that have ultimately held our world, the wild community, hostage. Our mythos is cracking.

Human nature may historically have a lot of baggage, but from an ecological and biological perspective, it's pretty impossible to dismiss. We are born hunter-gatherers, everything that domesticators have sought to impose is working against that basis. And they are failing as much now as they always have. "Wildness", ecologist Paul Shepard was known to remind us, "is a genetic state."⁹

Wildness is *our* genetic state.

The Nature of Language and Language of Nature

*"Reification, the tendency to take the conceptual as the perceived and to treat concepts as tangible, is as basic to language as it is to ideology. Language represents the mind's reification of its experience, that is, an analysis into parts which, as concepts, can be manipulated as if they were objects."*¹⁰

- John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*

Wildness is a complicated concept.

Its critics have conflated *wildness* with *Nature*, a move that obscures intentionality with conventional shorthand. From the very start, proponents of wildness have made a decisive choice in this language. What is being lost in the shuffle is that if you hold an ecological perspective, that the presence of wildness is hardly a means to supplant god/s, but indicative of the connections that we, as wild beings, share with the world. It's an exploration of empathy, not an apathetic move to remain enthusiastic by-standers like conservationists.

The purpose isn't to evoke wildness as an aesthetic, but as continuity, as our baseline: this is the ground that we are standing upon and it is worth defending. That the word is indefinable speaks to its complexity, it demands engagement.

So why use it?

There are many reasons not to use a word or to avoid naming altogether. Wildness, at least how I experience and conceptualize it, is sacred: that word is an indicator, not an encapsulation. That would be a good argument for leaving it even more obscure. But the problem then comes down to intentions. If I want to discuss civilization with anyone, this is my baseline, my reference point: wildness is the attainable and lurking reminder that we were not meant to live civilized lives.

Wildness, as the term is often used, transcends space and time: unlike *wilderness* it is not a place and unlike *nature* it is not external. Wildness is reflective of a continuum. Sure enough, hippies and New

Agers may have tried touching on it and self-help gurus might delve into the term,¹¹ but there's a degree of inescapability to that. Words travel. As recent attempts to completely own and market *rewilding* have highlighted, you can't control the usage, but you can contribute to the context.

That is not a minor point. Anthropologist Hugh Brody saw it as a more practical observation in terms of the age old question as to whether language shapes the mind or mind shapes language: "a person can explain how a word is used and what it refers to, but the word's *meaning* depends on knowing a web of contexts and concealed related meanings."¹²

That the term *wildness* can be written off isn't an indication of how the word itself is reification, our abstract representation, because all words are arguably reifications. The difference is in the *context*. Should wildness be defined and corralled into a trap of stagnancy, then the context, that flowing, organic, struggling and ever-presence that defies reflection, would be another matter altogether.

Like domestication, it's easier to know it when you see it.

The problem is that we aren't seeing it.

Ecologist David Abram in his landmark book on perception, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, echoes a trajectory of philosophy in pointing out that: "the perceptual style of any community is both reflected in, and profoundly shaped by, the common language of the community." For our rooted hunting and gathering relatives, that language includes "the speech of birds, of wolves, and even of the wind". Contrast that against the world of the civilized, the world we've all been raised in, where "we now experience language as an exclusively human property or possession".¹³

For all of our narcissistic obsessions with technological development, we have completely disregarded that the counterpoint to the self-applied badge of Progress is our increased our dependency upon stimulation overload on one side and complete sensory deprivation on the rest.¹⁴ Building upon civilization's foundation of hierarchy and complacency, we externalize our frustrations to (and often beyond) the point of self-destruction. I'll allow an anthropologist to state it lightly:

"if our species really did evolve in the context of social relationships approximating those in current immediate-return societies, then our current delayed-return societies may be requiring us to behave in ways that are discordant with our natural tendencies"¹⁵

Put bluntly: removed of our own wild context, we are out of balance.

Nature, the bandage we apply on the externalized wild world that we are actively destroying, is our counterpoint. It is our Other.¹⁶ “Nature” as sociologist Peter Dwyer aptly points out, “is an invention, an artifact.”¹⁷ Not one to mince words, anthropologist Tim Ingold gets down to it: “the world can only be ‘nature’ for a being that does not belong there”.¹⁸ As we will elaborate, this is yet another civilized disease which hunter-gatherers have not suffered:

“[Hunter-gatherers] do not see themselves as mindful subjects having to contend with an alien world of physical objects; indeed, the separation of mind and nature has no place in their thought and practice.”¹⁹

The obedience required by the domesticated demands a world of binary dualisms: of innately oppositional forces. In turn, it created those dichotomies. Nature versus civilization, wild versus domesticated, developed versus undeveloped: there are many iterations of an increasingly antagonized division between the individual and the world that surrounds them. We can say this is a problem of linguistics, we can use philosophy and theory to try to perfect the language and have an asterisk on every word we utter, but none of this escapes the fact that the *reality* domestication has created is one of binary opposition.

Civilization doesn’t just oppose nature; it created it so that it could stand against it. This is what we have conquered. This is what we have crawled out from to stand on our feet with pride.

Wildness vs Wilderness

*“The idea of wilderness, both as a realm of purification outside civilization and as a special place with beneficial qualities, has strong antecedents in the High Culture of the Western world. The ideas that wilderness offers us solace, naturalness, nearness to a kind of literary, spiritual esthetic, or to unspecified metaphysical forces, escape from urban stench, access to ruminative solitude, and locus of test, trial, and special visions—all of these extend prior traditions. True, wilderness is something we can escape to, a departure into a kind of therapeutic land or sea, release from our crowded and overbuilt environment, healing to those who sense the presence of the disease of tameness. We think of wilderness as a place, a vast uninhabited home of wild things. It is also another kind of place. It is that genetic aspect of ourselves that spatially occupies every body and every cell.”*²⁰

—Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*

This realization about the limitations of nature can stupefy any attempt to use that history as a foundation. It can be easy and, at times, soothing to get lost in a metaphysical escape and quandary. But to look back to the observations brought up by Brody, language isn't our problem, context is. And our context is a frightening one.

We live in an era of great disruption and unprecedented change: weather patterns have destabilized, blind desperation and a complete lack of foresight allows us to drill deeper and clear-cut mountains, economies respond, those who have the least to gain from this hyper-Modernized global economy stand to suffer the most impact of ecological consequence.

Our problem ends in catastrophe if a change in perception doesn't turn into action on its behalf. And this is why we speak of wildness. It is not the externalized passive matter that may constitute *nature*.

It surges. It pulses.

It is your heart beating.

It is your lungs taking in air and your throat exhaling breath.

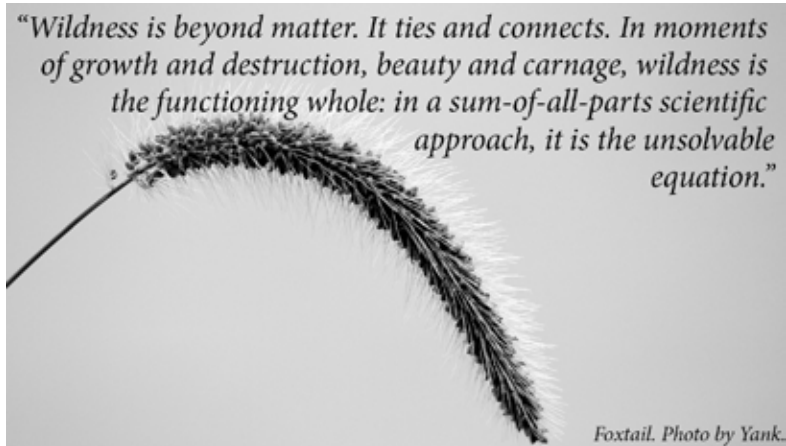
Wildness is beyond matter. It ties and connects. In moments of growth and destruction, beauty and carnage, wildness is the functioning whole: in a sum-of-all-parts scientific approach, it is the unsolvable equation. Reiterated through the worldview of rooted hunter-gatherer and horticultural communities, what has been called traditional ecological knowledge "goes well beyond noting the interrelatedness of specific organisms; it embraces an all-encompassing world-view of total relationship."²¹ Furthermore, this enacted knowledge "is generally holistic, and not easily subject to fragmentation. To deconstruct it and arrange its features in analytic categories, and then to discuss them cross-culturally, is to Westernize them."²²

Much of what can be said of wildness in defiance of nature echoes into the discussion about *wilderness*.

Following up on his observations about wildness as a "genetic state", Paul Shepard contrasts wilderness as the place we have dedicated for wildness to exist. An extolling of demons, a soothing of lingering desires: the playground and museum to engage our senses through voyeurism. But the cost of entry here isn't just complacency, it's far more malicious. The narrative offered is a reiteration of our distancing, but the trip is courtesy of your local tour agent: our leisure is another purchase.

In Shepard's words: "Wilderness sanctuaries presuppose our ac-

ceptance of the corporate takeover of everything else. Privatizing is celebrated as part of the ideal of the politics of the state, masked as individualism and freedom.”²³ The experience of wilderness is far from an expression of wildness. The terms may only differ by a mere two letters, but the implications couldn’t be greater.



That adventures in wilderness have become a basis for actual dispossession and displacement for those hunter-gatherers, who lacked a context for *nature* as a removed place, is no coincidence. Exemplifying the point, the Hadza of Tanzania were threatened with forced removal from ancestral lands by a hunting safari company based out of the United Arab Emirates.²⁴ A fate that resonates amongst the !Kung of Botswana and Namibia who are arrested for poaching and trespass within reserves that bear their names.²⁵

These are stories that repeat and play out constantly throughout history, which is since civilized people began recording time instead of living within it. These are the footnotes to the autobiographical legacy of colonizers and conquerors. While we have been ingrained with their perceptions and narratives, they still must constantly be positioned to work against our own wild state: the hunter-gatherer inside your mind, your being.

To awaken those senses, it is helpful to understand how those rooted peoples see their world. *Our* world.

Perception and the Living Earth

“I was born in the forest. My forefathers came from here. We are the Wanniyala-aetto and I want to live and die here. Even if I were to be

*reborn as only a fly or as an ant, I would still be happy as long as I knew I would come back to live here in the forest.*²⁶

-Kotabakinne (Veddah) chief, Uru Warige Tissahamy

The abolition of *nature* is not an uncommon theme amongst post-modern philosophers. Their impulse is born of Modernity and interacts with the world as they have been trained to see it. They are correct in their assessments that the world is constantly in flux and that stagnancy stands in the way, but they continue on the legacy of the ungrounded, the uprooted. Their sense of entitlement to a present without bounds neglects the consequence of the world as we know it: the world where our actions impact life across the planet and beyond our generation.

They carry on without context.

To see the past, present and future as evident in all life is an ability that we should have, but that perception comes only with living in a way that is not detrimental towards the past, present and future. Rooted indigenous societies have notoriously lacked any sense of linear time. Like *nature*, they lack the separation necessary to create it.

In living with the hunter-gatherer Pirahã of Brazil, missionary turned agnostic Daniel Everett observed that the inability to “spread the word” was attributed in part to the fact that Pirahã “only make statements that are anchored to the moment when they are speaking, rather than to any other point in time.”²⁷ Their world lacked a need to speak in historic terms and, subsequently, their language lacks anything beyond a simple form of tense.

A world without presence was unthinkable.

That is the world in which wildness runs rampant. It is the place where language has never been solely attributed to humans. This is the place where the messages of animals, plants, and weather are taken at face value and understood. The ability to read the language of birds is a given. The ability to read bodies and movement are not separated from the definitiveness that we attribute only to speech. This isn't the world beyond nature; it is the world where it is unnecessary.

The connectivity that New Agers and their ilk have sought to be proponents of is a by-product of our own limits to perception. Our glass is fogged over. Those connections are within reach, but we have to be prepared for the humility of breaking down the domesticator in our minds.

For the hunter-gatherer, no such obstructions exist until they have been forced upon them. Their perception minces no words on the matter of matter. In the words of Ilarion Merculieff, an Aluet native, speak-

ing of the world of the hunter-gatherer;

“Theirs is a world in which the interdependence of humans, animals, plants, water, and earth – the total picture – is always immediate, always present. And the total picture – every day, every season, every year – is seen as a circle. Everything is connected: the marshlands to the beaver, the beaver dams to altered conditions, the new conditions to the moose herd, the moose herd to the marshlands. Each affects the other, and it is in this intimate knowledge of the environment (all the curves in the circle) that has allowed these people to survive for hundreds of generations.”²⁸

The ability to externalize “the Other” is demolished through proximity and familiarity. Anthropologist William Laughlin observes a common theme amongst the development of children in hunter-gatherer societies: the passing on of the world of the hunter as a trade in and of itself. The wholeness of climate, growth patterns, migration movements, the knowledge of track, sign and bird language, the detailed knowledge of anatomy that comes from butchering and stalking; all of these elements are integral to life in the wild.

This is not particular to humans, but in using language to reflect upon it, Laughlin observes: “Their conversations often sound like a classroom discussion of ecology, of food chains, and trophic levels.”²⁹ This is not lost on the children, whose growing knowledge of animals is “prominently based upon familiarity with animal behavior and includes ways of living peacefully with animals, of maintaining a discourse with them.”³⁰

Philosophy is not an adequate replacement for proximity without separation. Wildness here needs no interpretation, but is often subject to exaltation. “I suggest”, observes Mathias Guenther of the timeless rock art of the !Kung, “that animals are beguiling and interesting to man *prima facie*, in and of themselves, without any mediation through social structure.”³¹

The relationships in question bare more resemblance to symbiosis than the symbolic. The case of the Honey Guide bird in the Kalahari is one oft-cited example. The Honey Guide leads a more physically able being towards beehives to harvest honey. It matters not if that being is a human or a honey badger so long as the harvester sets honeycomb aside for the willing and patient guide.³²

And yet the language of wildness here maintains a circumstantial definition. Little more is needed.

The participants in this world need no terminology and, in light of

solid context, the terms may be translated into a placeless language like English, but without having relative experiences, the meaning is lost. I feel the weight of the words used by the Mbuti, whom Colin Turnbull lived amongst, as they spoke of *ndura* or “forestness” represented by the symbols of fire, water, air and earth, which they “cannot move, eat, or breathe without being conscious of one or all of these symbols, and all are treated with respect, consciously recognized as integral parts of the ultimate giver of life, the forest.”³³ What resonates further within me is that the wind is upheld as *pepo nde ndura*, or, “the breath of the forest itself.”³⁴ Amongst the Nayaka of southern India, the forest is similarly referred to as “the giving environment.”³⁵

It is important to note that while my emphasis so far has been on animals, the same notions and connections extend to plants themselves. They too can serve both as messengers and healers. Herbalist and natural veterinarian Dr. Randy Kidd shares a story of having attempted to grow mullein in his own rock garden to no avail. He decided to ask his neighbor about the beautiful stalks of it growing in their yard. The neighbors had paid little to no attention to the sage-like green stalks and their tiny yellow flowers protruding amongst the rocks, but they happened to mention that one of the residents was currently hospitalized for asthma – a disease which mullein is known to treat.³⁶

Our ability to forget that our connections extend beyond other animals has led equally to the facilitation and “the loss of plant species, the loss of health in ecosystems and our bodies, and the loss of the sense of who we ourselves, are.”³⁷

The tragedy that we face arises both from our distancing from that timeless world and the ways in which our rooted hunter-gatherer minds are physically incapable of thinking on a global scale.³⁸

We are trapped by circumstance.

Our escape demands a realization of the world as it has been and will be, but remains hindered by the obstructions, the sheer physicality and devastation that civilization has created. The urge is there to delve completely into the world of the hunter-gatherer, a place both rooted and unbound. It is the place where we belong and it lurks within us and struggles to stand its ground on the periphery. But ignorance is not our path there.

Empathy is.

By seeking to immerse ourselves in the wildness that surrounds us, we can't expect the spiritual salvation offered by Gurus on weekend

retreats. This place is sacred, but it is not a safe place. It is under assault. As are we. As are all living beings.

It is through connection, through grounding, that we understand what is at stake, what is lost and forgotten, buried and removed. When we begin to prod our constant process of pains inflicted upon our being, when the Self and Other fade, when we identify that source of agony: only then will we fight with passion and meaning for what is known.

Wild Existence, Passionate Resistance

*"An-archic and pantheistic dancers no longer sense the artifice and its linear His-Story as All, but merely one cycle, one long night, a stormy night that left Earth wounded, but a night that ends, as all nights end, when the sun rises."*³⁹

-Fredy Perlman, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan*

The term *rewilding* has had its share of false Gurus and snake oil salespersons attempting to derail the process and turn it into consumable fodder.⁴⁰ False hopes and rewilding "Ninja Camps"⁴¹ aside, the rewilding process, like the anarcho-primitivist critique, carries with it an innate understanding of human nature as rooted in nomadic hunter-gatherer life. To *re-wild* is to acknowledge that wildness is our baseline.

Rewilding, to put it simply, is about stopping and *undoing* the separation created through the domestication process. As programs may try to sway towards a singular emphasis on primal skills or may tiptoe around with the voyeuristic tourism of a hiker, this underlying principle remains. As the consequences of domestication continue to unfold and assault the world we live in, the radicalism of that sentiment stands.

What separates rewilding from any other form of naturalist and ecophilosophical inquiry is that the end point is integration. The path overlaps in terms of observation, but the "leave only footprints" Nature fan has no interest in undoing the dichotomy that civilization requires. Their quest is one of indulgence, not subsistence and substance. It is akin to meditation.

To embrace the wild, we have to undergo the process of allowing wildness to help us evaluate our baggage. To remove our separation requires a transformation of thought that erodes the scientific taxonomy that seeks to understand the world through a microscope. As naturalist

Jon Young points out, native knowledge and scientific knowledge are “two ways of paying supremely close attention.”⁴² Native knowledge, or “science without all of the trappings”, is riddled with empathy, itself “a dangerous word in science” as it stands in complete opposition to the necessary removal implicit in the intent cloak of objectivity.⁴³ Young argues that his primary focuses, bird language/communication and tracking, rooted at first in observation inevitably lead those who take the time to “not just show up, but really tune in”, to build relationships and experience the community of wildness on its own terms will experience what can only be called a primal awakening.⁴⁴

That is a spiritual awakening.

Echoed by tracking instructor Paul Rezendes, what I call the “radical humility” of having your ass handed to you by the wild in terms of thought and physicality is no easy process. As having been raised with the redirected impulses of a wild being towards consumable traits, we have much work to do. It is only “when the self becomes tired and weak and pride languishes can the awareness that is wildness step in.”⁴⁵

The salvaging of scientifically understood connections through biology, ecology, psychology, as well as anthropology and sociology, requires a difference in perception. That the methods used to gain knowledge are flawed doesn't change that they can still glean elements of reality; they just took the long way there. The pride of achievement domestication awards us can quickly fade in light of, as Young states, “what the robin already knows.”

The teachings of the robin are not far off from those of our hunter-gatherer relatives. They remind us of the timeless place where history is lived rather than charted. “Both humans and non-humans, in short,” Tim Ingold observes, “figure as fellow-participants in an ongoing process of remembering.”⁴⁶ Wildness is within us. Wildness surrounds us. It suffers alongside and through us, its wounds still being inflicted.

Yet it does not give up.

No amount of concrete, steel, ideology, or distancing has succeeded in its conquest. None will. Civilization measures its victories in temporal measures that within a historic timeline appear significant. Removed of linear time, removed of our forgetting, our disconnect, their significance wanes into collections of dusty books and obsolete technology.

Civilization is both a complex and volatile target. Its ideology and mechanics are built upon regurgitated narratives built upon the false be-

lief that our future, as humans, will take us from the dreaded earth. That our history will show a gruesome conquest of animality, ours included, moving from the reflection of gods to a god status.

And yet each of us, every single one of us, is falling apart along the way.



Photo by Yank.

We are testaments to the failures of domestication. Our bodies, built to withstand the extremes of climate, movement, famine and feast, succumb to diseases of the sedentary, the undernourished, the overfed, the toxins, and the meaningless wanderings. Blind to the catastrophe unfolding through us, we miss the connectivity hiding in plain sight: the wildness creeping through the cracks. Turnbull, contrasting the emptiness of civilization against the grounded life exhibited amongst the Mbuti, noted that having “never learned to employ our whole being as a tool of awareness” has kept us from “that essence of life which cannot be learned except through direct awareness, which is total, not merely rational.” Encounters with the Spirit, the wildness, in “our form of social organization merely allows it to happen as an accident, if at all, whereas the Mbuti writes it into the charter from the outset, at conception.”⁴⁷

The structure of Mbuti life embraces the *pepo nde ndura*, the breath of the forest, whereas the structure of our world is built around avoiding or diverting it at all costs. If another way of being were seen as possible, the sanctity of the Freedom to Consume would fade. The burden of work would collapse.

And it is through the reconnection with the wild, through the erosion of our stagnant sense of removal, that the weaknesses of civilization become apparent. The struggle of the wild becomes real. The impact of climate instability and ecological devastation become our

battle cry. The exacerbated feedback loops of drought and flood, the fires of thirst and embattled forests ignite our animalistic urges.

When we remove the distance between the destruction of the earth and bear the scars of wildness, we will know not only what the robin has told us, but what our indigenous and lost relatives and ancestors have told us: when you know what it means to be wild, you will know what it means to fight.

To struggle.

To resist.

Around the time that I began to acknowledge the messages I had been getting from wild messengers, I began to push myself further into the woods. I tried to escape the sounds of the designed world. But valleys carried the echo of distant engines. Power lines and radio towers carried the news of conquest.

There was much to be found in those forests, but perhaps what I found the most was within myself. I had much to learn. I have much to learn. As my love and empathy grew, my rage burned deeper. The sheer simplicity of symbiosis tears at my soul. How many messages had I missed? Why, in light of my own complicity with ecocide, were the wild ones willing to recognize me, a descendent of colonizers walking on stolen land?

But it wasn't me they were after.

Just as hunter-gatherers lack a conceptual basis for nature or wilderness, the wild lacks the framework for vengeance. The language of birds will immediately ring the alarm over our indifferent, yet aloof demeanor whether we chose to recognize that or not. Their communication has nothing to hide and they share their trepidations widely. Hunter-gatherers and anyone willing to acknowledge this can act accordingly. Strange though our behaviors might be, the birds recognize what we have been trained not to see: the wildness that we carry in our being.

We belong here.

Their songs, their alarms, these messages; all of these are an unquestioned part of their world. Of our world.

And they await our return.

I often wish that Nature was real. That vengeance was within her. That she would undo civilization. No doubt she possesses the might. But it doesn't work that way: the sheer weight of inevitability errs on her side, yet I am left with nothing to transpose my own helplessness onto. There is no escape.

Wild beings under attack simply respond. They bite. They claw. They tear. It is instinctual and instant, not prolonged and devoid of responsibility. Our playing field is not level. Planners and programmers play chess with our fates. The potential of our own demise is the footnote to blueprints for a Future that will never come on a planet that was never meant to support it.

There is no easy salvation here. Wildness is not a retreat.

When we overcome our rational minds and embrace it in our souls, we will do as our wild relatives, human and nonhuman, have done: stand our ground.

Bite, claw, and tear.

And we will fight until the wound is no longer inflicted.

The power of the known, the meaning of context, the power of wildness lies in their ambiguity. The inability to define wildness attests to its enduring strength. It refuses constraint.

You will simply know it when you feel it.

And I can think of no greater end to aspire to.

Endnotes

1 Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature*. Harper and Row: New York, 1978. Pg. 1

2 Tim Ingold, 'Time, Memory, and Property' in Widlok and Tadesse, *Property and Equality Volume 1: Ritualisation, Sharing, Egalitarianism*. Berghahn: New York, 2007. Pg 165.

3 Patricia and Clay Sutton, *How to Spot an Owl*. Chapters Publishing: Shelburne, VT, 1994. Pg. 18.

4 Laurens van der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*. Harvest: San Diego, 1958. Pg 260.

5 John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions*. Washington Square Press: New York, 1994. Pg. 136.

6 John Livingston, *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation* in *The John A. Livingston Reader*. McClelland and Stewart: Toronto, 2007. Pg 89.

7 This is a point Paul Shepard did not miss. It is a common theme amongst his work, but most notable in *Nature and Madness*. Sierra Club Books: San Francisco, 1982.

8 Colin Turnbull, *The Human Cycle*. Simon and Schuster: New York, 1983. Pg 129.

9 Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. Island Press: Washington DC, 1998. Pg 138.

10 John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal* (2nd Edition). CAL Press: Columbia, MO, 1999. Pg 34.

11 Radicals are not to be dismissed from this as well. The prime example being Derrick Jensen who tried appropriating the "language older than words" as he believed indigenous peoples have reiterated it. This, however, ends tragically after he began calling himself Tecumseh, talking about domestic animals offering their bodies to his axe, having his dogs eat feces from his source, or having sex with trees. Needless to say, his "conversations" with nature, lacking in any and all humility, bare little resemblance to those reiterated otherwise here.

12 Hugh Brody, *The Other Side of Eden*. North Point Press: New York, 2000. Pg 47.

13 David Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*. Vintage: New York, 1997. Pg 91.

14 For more on this see my essay 'The Suffocating Void' in *Black and Green Review* number 1. Black and Green Press: Ephrata, PA, 2015.

15 Leonard Martin and Steven Shirk, "Immediate-Return Societies: What Can They Tell Us About the Self and Social Relationships in Our Society" in Wood, Tesser, and Holmes (eds), *The Self and Social Relationships*. Psychology Press: New York, 2008. Pg 178.

Tucker: To Speak of Wildness

- 16 For more on this subject, see my essay "Egocide" in Kevin Tucker, *For Wildness and Anarchy*. Black and Green Press: Greensburg, PA, 2009. Also pretty widely available online.
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THE UNSEEN LIGHT

LINCOLN FINCH

Tonight I went out into the woods. In a car, mind you, I went out into the woods in search of the northern lights. Because I heard from my friend, who heard from the internet that it was gonna happen.

And as I searched for the path that promised the most darkness, I realized that the city didn't end, it sprawled out into welllit and clean suburbs. The city doesn't want to end, I thought. So I found myself burning more and more oil, through the combustion of an engine, oil dug from the depths of the earth, to propel me out of this light dome, generated by dams and more oil. I was using oil to try to escape the effects of mass use of oil, oil to escape oil converted into stale yellow light of burning fuses, for miles and miles on end. But it became too late: work tomorrow.

The end was not in sight. I didn't have a map, which I would need since I don't really live here, per se, on the land, as did the people who used to actually live here called the Spokane ('the children of the stars' in SpokaneKalispelSalish), who may have been granted this sky and its stars and the particular dance of light it will do tonight before them, just by living here, which I only really know about and am looking for because science told me. And no, I didn't use an assemblage of rarefied metals that strangers dug from the earth and shot into space called a satellite to tell me where I might go, to escape this human dome of energy, needed because otherwise the rulers (my representatives, our moneyed constituents) wouldn't see as well as someone who has already been in the dark and who could then be waiting for them in the dark to relieve themselves of being ruled, however momentarily.

And as I made my way back I realized that what I saw was not the northern lights, it was the reason for the absence of the northern lights, what I saw was an endless carpet of people cranked out by oilpowered civilization, what I saw was that I apparently voted No to darkness (the moneyed constituents our rulers said No), and that the lords of district streets voted No to be able to privately enclose themselves in their darkness. Because even if the view were available, as one –more silent than usual– relief from the routine, someone would have been there to make me pay for it.

What I saw tonight was my own domestication.



Editor's note: this essay began as a response to Cliff Hayes' 'Stone Tools and Symbolic Thought' in the 'For Discussion' section. It carried on from that point, but it is helpful to start with Cliff's piece first to see the discussion taking place.

A Tale of Two Tools

Prior to the agricultural invasion, during the 12,000 year time period following the warm up which ended the last maximum of the Late Wisconsinian glaciation and initiated the present interglacial known as the Holocene, the great plains of the North American continent in many ways paralleled the great savannahs of Africa. Both were comprised of similar ungulate game abundance, topography, and vegetative mosaics consisting of expansive grasslands interspersed with open woodlands and thicker, mesic, riparian corridors¹. This was the land-base that the nomads discovered and physically and psychologically connected with upon arrival. Such dry, open places with the occasional cover of woods and smatterings of stone outcrops and bluffs were imbedded into the bodies and minds of the nomadic hunters from their earliest origins in similar African environs and no doubt stayed with them over the course of their tens of thousands years journey across the steppes of Eurasia and into middle America².

I had no idea of the above context regarding the history of human continuity related to the Wyoming lands that I often wandered as child. I knew from the stories that the land was once inhabited by "the Indians" and I used to lie in bewilderment late at night with a sense that Indian ghosts were watching me through the basement window.

I developed an early fascination with these mystical people whom most of the old white folks warned me were dangerous and no good. One of my great grandfathers had homesteaded here after his time in the US Cavalry during the Indian Wars. If only I could have spoken with him and heard his stories about the Indians. A later descendent, a great uncle, was a passionate rock hound and his collection of stones had been passed down the family line.

Part of this collection included stone tools, "Indian arrowheads" my grandfather informed me. I prized holding these in my hand, feeling their texture and wondering about their stories. This land was rich in paleoarchaeological sites and when I grew older I followed the tradition of my great uncle and began "arrowhead hunting". One of the tools I found was a rudimentary end-scraper made from chert. Compared to some of the points I had discovered, the scraper was not very exciting; in fact it was difficult to tell if it was an actual tool. It was only much later, when I began to learn how to brain tan deer skins that I realized this piece was a functional tool, a rounded, purposely serrated edge connected to a thicker handle area which seemed as if to be designed perfectly to fit the user's thumb and forefinger. I realized I could use this tool to scrape clean a skin. In my ramblings around the prairies I found a few more tools; a few points, but mostly scrapers. These scrapers were more uniform and refined in shape; none of them were as unique as the first one.

Fast forward a couple of decades and I am overnighing in a cave in the Drakensburg Mountains of southern Africa. I'm here because this has been said to be one of the most ancient human landscapes, a principal hunting grounds for bands of San peoples for tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of years. Ancient rock shelters and San rock art abound here in these high mountain canyons. In fact it has been said that these deep canyons and caves were likely a last refuge of the San peoples in the more hospitable interior regions of southern Africa before they were either hunted to death by the Afrikaners or lucky enough to escape northwards into the more marginal Kalahari Desert, the ancient ones who called these mountains home for ages banished forever. Ironically their shelters, their water holes containing cool, crisp, pure wild water, their grasslands, their rock art, and the herds of eland that they hunted and revered, all remain.

Lithic scatters also abound here, in and around the caves, on the trails, and in the grass. Stone tool manufacture and use in these parts stem all the way back in time to human beginnings, Dream Time, pre-San, pre-sapiens. In such a setting it's quite difficult for an old

Wyoming arrowhead hunter like me to keep my eyes anywhere but on the ground. It was on a walk across a large open expanse of grassland, at a tiny little creek crossing hidden in the grass, that I found it. All I saw was the rounded edge of a stone sticking out of the mud, but its relatively uniform shape was enough to give me pause. I kneeled down and scraped away the mud with my fingers and extracted the stone. My hand held a tool, a scraper, nearly identical in design to that first scraper I ever found, in the prairie grass on a continent in a different hemisphere, on the other side of the earth³.



My discovery of each of these two scraper tools occurred as surface finds and thus not within any association to strata or other datable evidence, which means it is impossible to tell how old either of these tools are. The Wyoming tool, if we are to approximate based on the archaeological consensus for the timeframe of human arrival in middle North America, cannot be any more than 12,500 years old⁴. Thus it could be of Paleoindian⁵ origin but it could also have been chipped within the last few hundred years by a hasty Lakota or Cheyenne needing to quickly prep a hide for transport. As for the African tool, the mystery goes much deeper. It could have been knapped by a San hunter during the nineteenth century or it could, based on its flaking, be from the Late Middle Stone Age and thus hundreds of thousands of years old.

Aside from each of the tool's similar crescent shape, similarly beveled edge, and similar finely flaked serrations, what most stands out in common is that on the underside of each tool a large flake has been deeply knocked out in order to provide an indentation for which

to comfortably place one's forefinger. In thinning the depth of the grip, this feature increases leverage in the scraping motion and undoubtedly increases the tool user's ability to persist for a longer time in the arduous task of scraping clean a skin.

I became so curious about the blatant similarity of these two tools, one found in Wyoming and one found in Africa, and possibly manufactured tens of thousands of years apart in time, that I took them to an archaeologist friend for analysis. The main observation she made regarding the tools was that these were hasty tools, likely knocked off of a core carried by a nomad, and knapped for the purpose of quickly accomplishing a task, generally for butchering and scraping the skin of an animal harvested and then discarded after the task was completed. "There's nothing unique about these tools" she informed me, in an apologetic tone, "either one of them could have been found pretty much anywhere and could have been made thousands of years apart. Scrapers like these are some of the most common types of Stone Age tools. So it's not surprising that you found one in Africa and the other in North America".

This has important implications. If *Homo sapiens* originated in Africa approximately 200,000 years ago and then around 70,000 years ago began to inhabit the rest of the world and this simple tool design can be found as an in situ artifact both in Africa and in Wyoming then its design must be at least that old as well, and this is highly significant.

A Brief Chronology of Stone Tool Innovation

For at least one and a half million years stone tools consisted of sharp flakes knocked off of bumpy, misshapen rock cores. The idea was simple and functional; to obtain a sharp edge, on demand, when needed for a task.

Evidence continues to mount for the antiquity of hominid stone tool craftsmanship. Recent finds at Lomekwi, Kenya indicate that effective stone tools have been crafted and used by hominids for at least 3.3 million years. Prior to the Lomekwi finds the earliest stone tool tradition identified was the Oldowan⁶, beginning at 2.6 million BP⁷. Due to the implications of the 3.3 million year Lomekwi discovery, predating Oldowan by 700,000 years and displaying *Australopithecine* knowledge of stone properties and core reduction by way of flaking, "Lomekwian" has now been proposed as the inaugural era of the stone tool record⁸.

While the Lomekwian 'tradition' is currently only represented by

a small suite of artifacts, many examples of Oldowan technology are present in the record. I have been lucky to view Oldowan implements first-hand. At first glance these crude flakes are unimpressive. Yet experimental archaeologists have efficiently butchered entire elephants using replicas of Oldowan flakes and paleoanthropologist Ian Tattersall remarks that their “effectiveness is...evident in the fact that stone tool kits barely changed over a million years...clearly this was a highly successful technology that did everything that was demanded of it”⁹. These earliest Oldowan tool makers chose rock with selective sophistication and obviously knew that fine-grained flints, chert, and obsidians were the choice materials. All of this points to an undeniable cognitive ability.

At approximately 1.7 million BP, Oldowan was eclipsed by the Early Acheulean tradition, which was marked by the innovation of handaxes¹⁰. Handaxes were knapped on both sides of a flake and thus represent the first known biface tools. Handaxes required a thoughtful striking pattern in order to produce a relatively symmetrical, long, tear drop shape. The Acheulean was a one-in-all tool that could be used for wood cutting, butchering, and hide scraping. Over the next million plus years, with little change in design, use of handaxe technology in the Acheulean tradition spread amongst hominid species around the world¹¹.

The next major innovations again occur over a million years later during the Middle Stone Age (MSA), with the appearance of prepared core implements in Africa around 500,000 BP and in Europe around 300,000 BP. An MSA core was worked in a refined, carefully detailed manner to yield multiple sharp flakes which were knocked off and made into specific tools¹².

By the onset of the Late Stone Age (LSA) prepared cores and biface flaking were the main methods of making implements worldwide. The LSA is also marked by innovation to blade technology, beginning in Africa 70,000 BP and in Europe at 40,000 BP¹³. A further refinement of prepared core techniques, more complexly formed flakes, at least twice as long as they were wide, were knocked off with hammer stones and/or antler/bone billets to produce blanks; specialized, thin blades to be used for further refinement into a multitude of tools and points. The innovation of prepared cores and blades is that several types of tools could be made for specific purposes from a single core. Blade technology included microblades, relatively much smaller flakes that could be made into the smallest points yet and thus quite possibly thatched to the earliest projectiles. Microblades also infer the presence

of inset technology, where carved elongated grooves facilitated blade attachment to ivory, antler, bone, and wood.

No doubt, over an exceedingly protracted course of time, from over three million years ago to the onset of the Holocene, technique was perfected, shapes became more linear and deliberate and styles were refined to be more effective in the task they were designed for. Yet the pattern displayed by the record is one of continuity. For the greater part of our history as a species we have responded to ecological and climatic shifts by continuing to use the same tool kits, rather than by inventing new technologies. Much more notable and consequential are the changes which occurred in a comparatively abrupt manner beginning around 40,000 BP when the record begins to yield an abundance of symbolic artifacts.

Stone Technology and its Correlates to the Rise of Symbolic Culture, or Lack Thereof

Stone implements and their means of manufacture are hardly ironclad proxies for symbolic thought processes on the part of toolmakers; and indeed it can be argued that we know little if anything in Old Stone Age technology that could demonstrate such mental processes. Throughout this period we can confidently confer symbolic intent only from overtly symbolic objects, or from the results of explicitly symbolic actions.

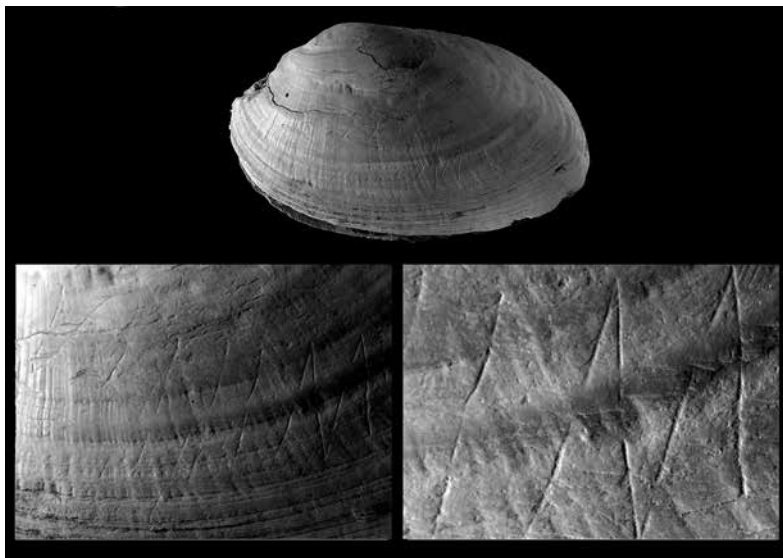
Ian Tattersall, *Masters of the Planet*

The same physical and psychological traits which allowed human capability to create tools from stone, our broad palmed hands with opposing thumbs which can pinch each of the fingers, our large brains with an ability to think in abstract terms, also allowed for our ability to use sharp objects to engrave the first symbols as a means of communication and artistic expression. This, along with vocal communication, is symbolic thought¹⁴.

Recent assertions for evidence of pigment use in Africa at 500,000 BP and the discovery of rudimentary engravings in seashells at Trinil on Java dated to around 400,000 BP have triggered speculation for the beginnings of symbolic thought during the time of Erectus¹⁵. Prior to the Trinil discovery, a few scattered MSA and LSA artifacts, including possible stone figurines, had been endorsed by some researchers as evidence of symbolizing by Neanderthal and Heidelbergensis in Europe¹⁶. However, the earliest definitive symbolic artifacts, carved

bones and decorative ostrich eggshell beads, found in southern Africa, are of sapiens origin, and dated at approximately 70,000 BP¹⁷.

Some anthropologists argue that development in the shaping of stone objects via early hominid hand and brain coordination led to a feedback relationship which evolved a capacity to progressively externalize thoughts, further leading to the advancement of deeper and deeper dimensions of symbolic thought over time, eventually giving birth to “higher-order consciousness”¹⁸. Because stone tool making is a process requiring a conceptually linear way of seeing the world, its innovation no doubt generated internalized psychological effects on human perception, but it remains in question whether the archaeological traces of early symbolism correlate strongly enough with the expansive timeline of stone tool innovation.



The few scattered earliest seemingly symbolic artifacts lack any other finds providing verifiable context¹⁹. The closest correlations occur in southern Africa, where the 70,000 BP symbolic artifacts share a close temporal and geographical context with evidence for the advent of both microblades and pressure flaking, which display a previously undocumented level of precision and complexity in stone tool manufacturing technique²⁰. Due to the shapes of the discovered microblades there is speculation that sapiens in southern Africa was producing projectile points and thus using bow and arrow technology at this time, an innovation which previously was thought to have occurred only within the Holocene timeframe²¹. While certainly

significant, the stone artifacts in question were not found within any context providing direct material correlation to any symbolic artifacts. “In isolation we cannot confidently read symbolic thought processes into any techniques of stone-knapping” says Tattersall²².

While multitudes of scholars and philosophers have posited sapiens use of symbols as the defining feature which makes us unique from all other species, both human and non-human, the known record seems to make clear that, for the majority of the time sapiens has existed, prolific use of complex symbols has not been a dominant trait of sapiens perceptions, psychologies, cultures, and relationships with one another and with the external world. With our appearance dated at approximately 200,000 BP, it isn’t until around 40,000 BP, at the point of transition between the MSA and the LSA and the arrival of the upper Paleolithic in Europe, that the record begins to become saturated with evidence for the influence of the symbolic on human thought²³. Over the course of the first sixty percent of our temporal existence as sapiens, any tool archaeologically associated with sapiens sites was made similar in form to older MSA tools. As such, intensive cultural emphasis on symbolic expression and information processing seems to have been present for less than forty percent of the time our species has existed, and only became culturally and psychologically dominant during the last twenty percent of our existence²⁴.

It is at this stage that we find the initial stirrings of symbolic culture; human groups, organized around social institutions and parallel mental faculties, which distance themselves from external physical life and perceive and classify it almost entirely through representational, mediating constructs. This level of evolving complexity becomes self-reinforcing and establishes the necessary prerequisites for eventual interpretation and organization via time, number, and written history; the resulting hallmarks of mass-alienation which define symbolic culture today. In essence, symbolic cultures are those which separated themselves from the world, created *otherness*, and went on to conquer it²⁵.

While throughout western history anthropologists entirely rooted in ‘progress-to-civilization-is-inevitable-and-good’ mentalities have interpreted sapiens use of complex symbols, language, and technology as sapiens specific badges of honor, the reality is that there was no great leap to new technology or symbolic culture which can be attributed to the appearance of sapiens. Rather, the qualitative leap to an overtly complex symbolic means of processing and communicating information “seems to have been made well *after* the acquisition by

our species of its distinctive biological form”²⁶. Tattersall describes the entire archaic anthropological record as displaying a recognizable disconnect “between biological and technological innovation in human evolution” and maintains that sapiens acquisition of symbolic culture was not “simply a threshold effect of acquiring a greater and greater brain volume over vast spans of time, as smarter individuals out produced dumber ones in our ancestral lineage”. He suggests that, instead of asserting some type of biologically evolved higher brain consciousness, “we need to look for a cultural stimulus that kicked the biologically pre-enabled human brain into symbolic mode”²⁷.

Dawning of the Great Separation²⁸

Evolving cultural traits and social institutions tend to shape the purposes and consequences of any novel symbolic representation. This is why it seems that only human groups with specific perceptions and intentions went on to become ruled by symbolic representation and interpret the world almost entirely through the lens of mediation.

None of this could have been done without hierarchy. Cultures, comprised of individuals and groups, have an ability to influence perceptions and create rifts in relations. In the case of elite individuals and groups, this is especially true. As influence grows, so too does a grasp on the material existence of others. Elites amass wealth and power, in turn creating worldviews that uphold the virtues of the elites. In this process, influential individuals within groups learn how to sophisticatedly use ancient symbolic institutions such as language, art, and ritual (and eventually new institutions such as time, number, and history) as avenues to socio-economic control.

An increasing reliance on the symbolic doesn't arise in a vacuum. There is a material shift here which drives social change. Symbolic culture becomes the medium to relay the message: a reiteration of the necessity of social dependency that underlies domestication. Thus, at base, the genesis of this cultural psychology is likely rooted in food procurement, because hierarchy cannot exist without controlling in some manner a people's material basis for survival. My view is that within human groups which developed an emphasis on intensive resource exploitation at levels beyond every day needs, an evolving social complexity resulted via new managerial and religious requirements related to the procurement and control of excess surplus, initiating the distancing which drove a shift towards the use of increasingly complex dimensions of symbolic representation and an overall uprooting from

the primal intimacy with otherness.

A noteworthy reference to pre-agricultural peoples directing immense energy towards symbolic representation and the ritual worship of powerful individuals are certain groups of the Gravettian Cro-Magnons. Evolving across central and eastern Europe 28,000–22,000 BP, at least some of the Gravettians stand out as people who began to practice an intense array of symbolic activity seemingly associated with social status.²⁹ Most obvious is a focus on decorative mammoth ivory found in what seem to be ritual burial sites designated for persons of an elite class. Ornamental artifacts in themselves certainly do not automatically imply that social life was being dominated by symbolic interpretations, but the Gravettian assemblages suggest an intensive cultural emphasis on status, wealth, and prestige associated with symbolic artifacts.



Even more suggestive of a possible qualitative shift in material and social life are the female figurines first yielded from Gravettian sites known as “Venuses”, the earliest known ceramic objects,³⁰. Formed into the shape of voluptuous females with large hips, buttocks, bellies, and breasts- a seeming idolization of increased weight gain – Venuses are indicative of a new human corpulence, hint at surplus production, and suggest a shift towards a new sedentary behavior

where consumption of calories by elites occurs lacking contribution to labor. The figurines are also thought to be representative of female fertility, emphasizing an ability to raise population levels. Venuses may even suggest the beginnings of a shift away from animal fat and protein as a primary food source and towards increasing utilization of second-rate vegetation based resources.

If all this is the case, we must consider the possibility that such groups may have been at least partial forebears of the later domestication of the European continent. The Gravettians seem to have evolved into the Magdalenians, the engineers of the most complex symbolic assemblages in pre-domesticated Europe and timing for the last evidence of the Magdalenians meshes well with the first possible evidence of domestic crops in southeast Europe, both occurring around 12,000 BP³¹.



Yet, the overall shift towards domestication cannot simply be assigned to an increase in symbolic thought. The ecological effects of climate warming following the Last Glacial Maximum in Europe around 19,000 BP almost certainly had an influence. By 17,000 BP most of Europe's landscape had shifted away from the tundra environs that the large-game hunters had adapted to and had become temperate woodlands. Magdalenian occupation seems to expand dramatically at this time and it is here that people also seem to have begun relying more "heavily on wild seeds and tubers for much of their diet"³²

It is probably not a coincidence that a noticeable enlargement of Cro-Magnon tribes in Eurasia occurs at the same time the record begins displaying symbolic representation at unprecedented levels³³. The evidence for evolving symbolic complexity coincides with

archaeological evidence for the intensification of food acquisition via development of specialized mass-hunting methods such as surrounds and drives. The increasing occurrence in the archeological record of sites associated with this intensification provides an overall impression of a newfound need to procure large amounts of food to feed growing populations³⁴. Later sites display a shift away from the previous focus on large game and indicate a newfound pursuit of small animals, birds, fish, and marine resources as well as an intensified use of “edible grasses”³⁵.

Archaeologist Brian Fagan sees the rise of increasingly more intensive dimensions of symbolic representation in Cro-Magnon Europe occurring as a result of the intertwined effects “of a warming world where populations were growing, hunting territories [were] becoming more crowded, and group and individual identity was [beginning to assume] ever-greater importance”. Fagan suggests it was here that the small-band nomadic life gave way to the sounds of “a monotonous *scrape, scrape* – a milling stone rubbing wild seeds on a grinder”³⁶.

Nonetheless, up until 4,000 BP “elusive, cautious ...silent” forest dwelling hunters remained on the peripheries of these great changes in Europe³⁷. These were the last representatives of a 40,000 year Cro-Magnon legacy that, all-in-all, should be characterized as one of longevity and resilience. But it would be disingenuous to posit that their obvious intensified use of symbolic representation did not have a role in the dynamics which led to their eventual demise as free-roaming hunters.

Seen from a more generalized level, any novel intensification of resource procurement, animal or vegetable will eventually lead to socioeconomic pressures which initiate a delayed yield psychology, which in-turn increases pressure on ecological systems³⁸. Here feedbacks between population growth and the need to produce and manage surplus introduce disruptions to both ecological and social carrying capacity. As carrying capacity is broached people begin to experience large scale socioecological systems disruption and are forced to enact a response to an evolving crisis.

The anthropological record informs us that, when facing crisis, responses by delayed yield oriented groups are often inadequate and hindered by cultural inertia³⁹. Without a material solution, such as nomadic dispersal and a relinquishing of the delayed yield psychology, one component of the response by a desperate population broaching carrying capacity will most likely be cultural and internal;

out of paranoia and desperation activating the dormant component of the human brain with the potential to utilize the most extreme dimensions of the symbolic and in-turn opening up opportunities for clever manipulators to grasp limited material wealth and influence sociopolitical power. As the history of civilization has shown, the resulting psychology of power meshed well with the material reality created by domestication and agriculture.

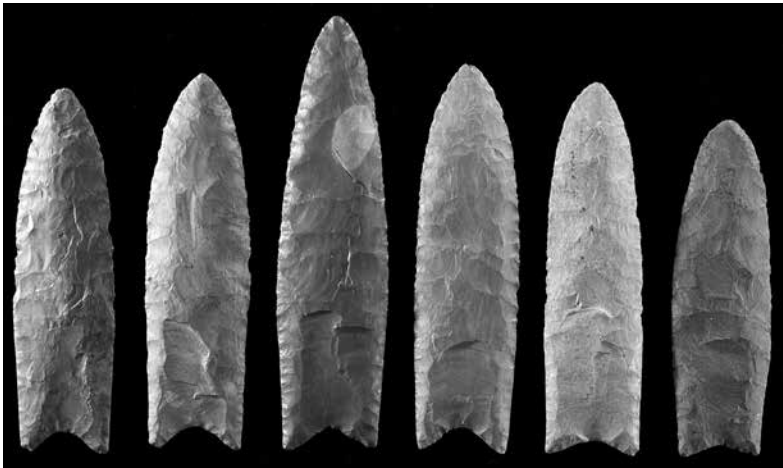
In totality, this is the state of affairs which ultimately initiated the onset of world domination and our current catastrophe and it is to these factors that we should be looking at for our pinpoints to what went astray and not towards something as staggered and disparate as advancing lithic technology⁴⁰. The Paleoarchaeological record shows that these cultural material factors would be entirely anomalous to the documented pattern where tools stayed virtually the same for millions of years. And then, for immediate return oriented nomads, even as tools became more refined, they continued to be manufactured mostly for practical use and with much less emphasis on symbolism. That rock which breaks in predictable ways must be chosen by even the most rudimentary knappers shows that the cognitive capability for the most abysmal dimensions of symbolic thought was already extant a few million years ago. Why did the majority of humans not go there? My answer is that surplus was so unappealing and impractical to small-band nomadic lifeways that it was largely imperceptible. Later, having inevitably witnessed the end result of delayed yield psychologies, either through personal experimentation or outside contact, many hunting peoples may have consciously chosen not to invest their physical and mental energies in material excess via surplus accumulation and instead chose to maintain the small-scale, band level life ways which had proven successful and resilient for their ancestors over the course of several millennia.

A people cannot simultaneously live wild and free and also be immersed in overtly complex dimensions of symbolic mediation. In immediate return hunting and gathering adaptations there is no need for energy spent inside of such pseudo-relations. Rather than symbolic representation, viewed as some type of great leap forward, a much more profound and enduring and adaptive human legacy is represented by the sheer evidence of low-impact survival for a few million years. Innovations that truly matter as enduring adaptations, such as pragmatically oriented stone tool manufacturing, shelter building, and the routine use of controlled fire, provide much stronger evidence for a temporally stable human intelligence than does the

emergence of symbolic culture and each of these important human innovations occur in the record without any large-scale correlates with stone tool innovation.

The Difference between Functional Continuity and Bondage to Elitist Reifications

My contention is that the measurements by which a tool should be gauged are its functional ability, its contribution to material survival per unit of human effort, the absence of specialization and social complexity required to produce it and thus its contribution to individual and community self-reliance, and its contribution to these entities physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. All of these variables inform us where a pathway in embrace of a certain technology or symbolic representation is taking us.



It may be that a touch of artistry is added to a tool, such as the engraving of an animal effigy or patterns into a bone point. This leans more towards personal expression, communication, and connection, not necessarily towards uprooting symbolization to any consequential degree. Such artistry is personal, replicable, based on emotion, empathy, and relationship with individual or multiple beings in the universe, and does not rely on complex social institutions; specialization, trade, or religious elites.

Regarding Paleoindian stone tools, a subject of speculation among archaeologists is the distinctive fluting found at the base of some stone points, particularly those of Clovis and Folsom designation which

“went well beyond what was necessary to make a functional tool”⁴¹. While the fluting feature thins the base of the point, potentially contributing to the strength of its hafting to a spear shaft, experiments have shown that hafting is not improved to any great degree by fluting and that, because it is a difficult and risky move for a knapper, the risk of breakage could never have been worth the gain of any functional benefit. As such, it has been proposed that the only purpose of the fluting could have been a symbolic or ritual one. Moreover, because “the degree to which Clovis people went to obtain colorful raw material is unparalleled in the prehistory of North America” and “seems to have gone well beyond expediency and mobility” it has been wondered if special sources of stone were thought to hold some type of symbolic power⁴²?

The incorporation of abstract concepts into tool design does not automatically imply evolution towards symbolic culture and we will probably never know the actual intentions and consequences associated with basal fluting. While evidence of Clovis ornamentation or animal symbols in cave art is rare to non-existent, a fair amount of archaeological evidence does exist for Paleoindian ritual practices. The blood red colored ochre mineral is known universally as a symbolic agent and was used in Paleoindian burials and likely in an array of pre-hunt rituals⁴³. At kill sites, stone points and bison skulls have been found coated with red ochre residue, suggesting these were deliberately placed for ritual purposes. Heavy red ochre extraction has also been documented.⁴⁴ Archaeological digs have yielded discoveries of ‘medicine posts’ placed adjacent to bison, elk, bighorn sheep, and pronghorn ambush locations. Paleoindian sites have also yielded deer skulls capped with trophy sized antlers arranged in what seems to be a ritual fashion and bighorn sheep and elk skulls have been found placed on shelves in rock shelters and in trees. Use of medicine posts by Native American shamans during the historical period was documented ethnographically and historical Plains Indians were known to have referred to some trees as ‘medicine trees’ and left offerings in their branches when they encountered them⁴⁵.

The ritual artifacts present in Paleoindian archaeological assemblages seem to be geared towards hunting and appeasement of animal spirits, not towards separation and conciliation to hierarchical gods or elite political masters. Moreover, ritual appeasement of animal spirits has been documented as fundamental to indigenous hunting practices worldwide, generally without association to the pitfalls of symbolic culture⁴⁶.

Regarding the application of red ochre for this purpose Ian Watts states that “African hunter-gatherers consistently make the analogy between women’s blood and the blood of the hunt, an analogy given material expression in the application of blood or a blood-like substance to the hunters or their weapons⁴⁷”. Moreover, Knight and Lewis posit deep roots for this blood symbolism, roots purely connected and intertwined with humans and wildness as not separate but whole and connected:

As women bled, it was as if they were a wounded game animal, and since men were related to their own mother through blood, this triggered the idea that the blood of kinship united them equally to the animals they hunted. Thus a single bloodstream ran through the veins of women and animals alike, suggesting the blood’s ultimate source in an ancestor who combined human and animal features – the ‘totem’. Once menstrual blood had been linked in this way with the blood of the hunt, it became logically possible for a hunter to respect certain animals as if they were his kin⁴⁸.

Symbolic intent becomes more consequential according to the degree it separates the human community from the world of otherness. In this sense artifacts associated with hunting rituals seem relatively inconsequential as symbolizing agents, especially when we know that band-level immediate return hunting and foraging people existed in relative sustainability and continuity across the planet for many thousands of years. As for North American Paleoindians, we know that many of their descendants maintained a nomadic, small-band, immediate return orientation well into the historical period⁴⁹. And we also know that some of their descendants eventually went on to become delayed return in orientation; domesticating corn and building cities, ultimately ruining themselves as a result.

In great contrast to what seem to be relatively benign ritual artifacts associated with Paleoindian hunting spirituality, an example of stone knapping that certainly occurred within the context of a debilitating and alienating, reified, massively symbolic, hierarchical, setting are the non-utilitarian uses of chert and obsidian by the corn agriculture oriented Olmec, Maya, Toltec, Mixtec, and Aztec Mesoamerican indigenous empires (approximately 2500-1500 BP)⁵⁰. Tens of thousands of obsidian ritual knives, large swords, daggers, lances, human effigies, ear spools, labrets, beads, jewelry, and vases have been excavated from Mesoamerican tombs⁵¹, the manufacture of which was

centered around a corpus of religious beliefs and ideology involving obsidian as a symbol of status and an underpinning of power.

The entire assemblage of these artifacts is both impressive and terrifying; perhaps the most degenerate are the thousands of chert and obsidian ritual sacrifice blades and daggers. Some of these were the implements used by the corn priests to extract the still beating hearts out of their human victims, while other finds consist of large ceremonial caches of knapped points embedded with fragments of gold, jade, turquoise, and alabaster in images of human eyes and mouths.

For the Mesoamerican empires, raw stone and its end products were full-blown commodities. Obsidian was mined, shipped, and traded in networks which spread across Mesoamerica. The manufacture of symbolic implements from obsidian and chert was accomplished by a full-time specialist class employed in workshops. At the ancient city of Teotihuacan, the remains of over five hundred obsidian workshops have been discovered. Obsidian trade was a key element in developing wealth for the elite class. Noble households even employed their own knappers to fulfill an incessant need for ritual objects⁵².

I once spent three days attentively combing through the collections of the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City and attest that one may not be able to view first hand a more powerful suite of indigenous artifacts demonstrating the pathway by which settlement, agriculture, delayed return, and an associated dependence on symbolic abstraction, reified religious elitism, and alienating political hierarchy devolves towards. How might it be that some former hunters devolved into this scenario while others remained small-scale, wild, connected, and free? I posit that at this time in history the latter peoples had some level of conscious recognition of the pitfalls associated with delayed return orientations and purposely kept their distance from them.

Various levels of trade in high-quality fine-grained stone amongst pre-agricultural peoples have been documented in the anthropological record. Across the world, trade, as a source of access to materials, but also a conduit to wealth and power, must have, in some cases, been monopolized by certain groups who assumed territorial control over quality stone outcrops. Geographically and territorially marginalized groups lacking access had the choice of either negotiating trade alliances or utilizing adaptations which allowed them to keep their distance from more powerful and potentially hostile groups.

In Alaska, for example, sources of fine-grained chert, flint, obsidian, and siltstone are vastly disparate geographically. This

geologic reality meant that quality stone was mined from quarries and carried potentially long distances by nomads. As a result, some peoples specialized in controlling access to this stone. However there is also a record of some groups making due without access to high quality stone. As a result slate, more abundant, but comparatively inferior, has a large appearance in the archaeological record, as do hunting points and tools made from bone, antler, and ivory, sourced from “the most plentiful of all raw materials: animal skeletons”⁵³.

A large game kill not only means access to food but obtainment of a supply of alternate material for making tools and hunting implements. The advent of tools and hunting implements from animal bone, antler, and ivory was accomplished with burins and graters, stone tools with protruding sharp drill-bit like points used to carve grooves in bone and antler from which could be extracted blanks for tools. Archaeologist Brian Fagan interprets this innovation as one which “changed history” because it afforded the invention of eyed needles and facilitated the manufacture of the animal skin clothing which allowed humans to explore and then inhabit the much colder northern climates⁵⁴.

Although many of these implements have been found decorated with symbols of one type or another, the manufacture of hunting points and tools made from bone, antler, and ivory is an example of practical innovation and could also be viewed as representative of a diversification in skillsets with a desired effect of mitigating any negative circumstances arising from dependence on obtaining stone through trade. Rather than accepting a reified sense of what is necessary and limiting cultural independence through intensified involvement in the exotic stone trade, small groups living remote from access to the highest quality stone could remain free and adaptable peoples by perfecting the art of bone, antler, and ivory tool manufacture via use of less quality stone with which to work bone, obtainable within their own territories. As such, in one respect movement into northern climates and related innovations in antler and bone use might also be viewed as an adaptive response by nomadic bands fleeing regions experiencing debilitating socioecological disruptions as they became increasingly saturated with delayed return oriented cultural occupations⁵⁵.

In the Paleo world, those in the business of specialized activities such as mining and trading stone, and simultaneously controlling access to it, were likely forced to some degree into a more sedentary, delayed return like behavior, whereas a nomadic adaptation was focused more on practicality, diversity, and independence, than on specialization and trade. Here the focus can be on living in a continuous direct

relationship with a biome, rather than facilitating distancing through mining stone for the purposes of trade.

Accordingly, while possession of the highest quality stone and an ability to manufacture the more fancy, artsy varieties of stone implements (ala Mesoamerica), leans towards being more technologically, economically, and socially inventive in regards to 'progress' -with direct tie-ins to status, privilege, and full-scale adoption of symbolic culture - the much more enduring pathway, in terms of a stable and egalitarian socio-economic adaptation, is to direct energy instead towards remaining self-reliant and independent, via avoiding trade deals or risk of attack by hostile people attempting to control access to quality stone quarries.

My own experience in our 21st century rewilding and *enskillings*⁵⁶ context confirms this approach. I have dabbled in stone knapping over the years and have had limited instruction by 'professionals' in the art. My knapping is as shabby as it gets, but through dedication I can produce usable tools and points. My points and knives are not works of art but I am confident if put to the test they would effectively kill and butcher game and I take pride that they are likely more reminiscent of the most rudimentary points discovered in archaeology than they are reminiscent of the more fancy artifacts. I don't have any need to turn my knapping into art or trade, as I see that with so much to accomplish today this would be impractical, just as it would have been long ago when specialization became a function of separation and division, greatly enhanced by symbolic mediation through time.

Occasionally, I might add a design pattern or an animal effigy to an arrow quiver, as an aesthetic effect with personal spiritual implications. But in doing so by no means am I making an attempt to interpret and organize the world dogmatically. As such, I maintain that we should view symbolic thought by a matter of degree, and base our analysis of symbols on their socio-economic and psychological consequences- a Folsom point made by a free hunter, with its non-functional fluting and coated in ochre as a means to reach out to connections between blood and hunting spirits, seems to be much less consequential in this regard than do Aztec ceremonial obsidian blades made in workshops by peasants living in bondage to religious elites.

Conclusion: To Where Shall Look For a Model?

We have seen that stone tools, crafted and used by humans, have been in existence for at least three million years. No doubt, over that long

course of time, technique was perfected, shapes became more linear and deliberate, evolving to sharp blades around 500,000 years ago in Africa, and flaked delicately from prepared cores 300,000 years ago. Styles around the world were refined to be more effective in the task they were designed for, and some tools were knapped as a contribution to symbolic thought and all of the complexity it entails, with a variety of consequences.



We cannot avoid the fact that refinement is an inevitable result of human intimacy and ingenuity, yet for those of us who prioritize autonomy and wildness it is extremely important to identify the process by which a tool can become no longer a tool of self-reliance but a tool which serves the needs of power, where functional continuity is superseded by gains of power-over through the use of persuasively reified images.

Metaphorically, the wild and free human is the human who can hastily knock out a functional tool from a stone core, a tool for use in the moment that can be discarded later without worry, a tool which has not suffered from reified notions that it holds specific power due to its fashioning under symbolic design implications. The two scrapers I found in Wyoming and Africa are these types of tools.

Tattersall's assessment that a specific cultural stimulus triggered the shift to a novel psychological domination by symbols is highly relevant to the anarchoprimitivist analysis⁵⁷. Cultural traits and social mechanisms are ultimately what shape the purposes and consequences

of any technological innovation. Does the innovation facilitate separation from one and another and from wildness or does it deepen our connections to these things? Does the innovation serve power or is it practical? If it is simply practical, can it be replicated by any individual using easily obtainable local materials? If it can't be replicated than it ultimately serves the needs of power. This is the litmus test for our tools.

For our purposes as primitivists, it is critical to keep in mind that tool innovation which occurs throughout the anthropological record is temporally very slow going, even with the emergence of sapiens. When archaeological assemblages do become dominated by complex symbolic artifacts, rather than simply practical ones, they are generally associated with cultures of domination, whether they are those of hunters or farmers. The essential takeaway, however, is that, as a matter of degree, the temporal correlates between alienating technological specialization and mass symbolic culture become extreme with settlement and agriculture – a comparatively colossal shift in human's ability, will, and desire to dominate. This onset certainly has deep temporal roots.

The paleoanthropological record points to shifts towards symbolic culture, a central dynamic in domestication's conquest of the world, having likely occurred ultimately as a maladaptive component in responses to largely self-imposed ecological, social, and spiritual crises experienced by specific groups of humans evolving towards delayed return socioeconomic practices. Certain practices of toolmaking, tool use, artistic expression, and ritual no doubt contributed greatly to this shift in perception as did the overall situation of evolving social complexity triggered by explosive population growth in settled locales. Consequently, this process furthered an evolution towards increasingly complex symbolic representation and further escalated the stirrings of mass society in the areas where delayed return and domestication became primary. As the psychology of domestication and domination associated with this spread across the globe, the crisis slowly deepened. As long as the evolved psychology of separation with the world remains at play, the crisis cannot be reconciled.

Modern programmers, and even some anthropologists, see this all not as crisis but as a 'successful' and inevitable cognitive redesign and speculate on the possibility that a mind without biology via artificial intelligence is our inevitable evolutionary trajectory⁵⁸

There is no denial that the comprehensive crisis which we now confront as species is partly a result of our large brains. Yet, the

anthropological record and all known history inform us of limits to our expansion and progress. Leading up to our current era, symbolic culture's track record likewise informs us of its overall failure to guide us towards truly adaptive social, economic, and spiritual realms.

Our capability for an actually intelligent and enduring adaptation is rooted in the grand temporal reality that crude tools from two million years ago have been shown to be just as capable at accomplishing the basic tasks they were designed for as the more artsy and sophisticated tools crafted a few million years later.

To me this means pausing, stepping back, slowing down. This is primitivism, above all else; knowing that the comprehensive crisis of civilization, including mass technological and symbolic complexity, is only representative of a minute fraction of anthropological time, embracing that core bit of fundamental knowledge and acting on it.

A core component of the task which now lies before us is a complete rejection of the ways by which the people of symbolic cultures have evolved to live more inside of their own heads than by the messages of wildness. We may have been born into a cultural psychology of mediation, separation, and internalized control, but deep inside we cannot shake from our brains the primal psychology of our ancestors who remained forever embedded in place. It is for this psychology which we ultimately fight for.

Let us do away with our ego driven, overtly symbolic, artsy-obscurantist, philosopher culture-psychosis. Taken to its extreme, this internalized, individualistic mindset has always been obsolete in the world of wildness, as it fulfills no socioecologically adaptive or functional purpose, other than individual escapism or use by elitists as a tool for spiritual alienation and socioeconomic control. The life span of the insular, overtly symbolic, reified, and ultimately manipulative way of human thinking has been short, when compared to the few million years that intelligent humans lived in full empathy with wildness.

Endnotes

1 The Asian steppes and much of North America were, of course, colder in climate than was ancestral Africa.

2 Alternative scenarios to the Beringian crossing as the pathway for initial human arrival in North America have been proposed. A robust argument for at least some groups of the original inhabitants of the Americas arriving not from Asia but from Europe is featured in *Stanford, D.J., and B.A. Bradley. 2013. Across Atlantic ice: the origin of America's Clovis culture. University of California Press.*

3 Nearly identical, but for the difference that the African tool is technically a side-scraper and

Four Legged Human: Written in Stone

the Wyoming tool is an end-scraper. The scraping edge on a side-scraper occurs on its long edge whereas the scraping edge on an end-scraper occurs on its short edge.

4 Based on all factors, estimates for initial human occupation of the Americas range from 40,000-12,500 BP. Meltzer, D.J. 2009. *First peoples in a new world: colonizing ice age America*. University of California Press asserts that the oldest agreed upon site is Monte Verde in Chile, dated at 12,500 BP and that the oldest confirmed Clovis site in North America is at Aubrey, TX. dated at 11,590 BP. Stanford, D.J., and B.A. Bradley. 2013 date Aubrey at 13,560 BP and assert that 'pre-Clovis' people occupied the Cactus Hill site in Virginia by at least 20,000 BP and that the oldest human occupation layer at Meadowcroft Rockshelter, PA. dates to approximately 18,500 BP. Regardless of origins, the spread of early Paleoindians into the Wyoming region of the northern Plains (particularly with the Goshen culture) seems to have occurred sometime between 11,000-14,000 BP. Thus, I have settled on a median of 12,500 BP as an approximate here.

5 *Paleoindian* when used in this essay refers to *New World* (Americas) cultures and artifact assemblages. *Paleolithic* used here refers those from the *Old World* (Africa, Asia, Europe).

6 Named for the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania where examples were first found.

7 Years before present, throughout this article abbreviated as BP.

8 Harmand, S. et al. 2015. 3.3-million-year-old stone tools from Lomekwi 3, West Turkana, Kenya. *Nature*. Vol 521.

9 Tattersall, I. 2012. *Masters of the planet: the search for our human origins*. Palgrave Macmillan. New York.

10 Hominid species in existence during the Oldowan phase include different types of *Australopithecines*, *Paranthropus*, *Homo habilis*, and *Homo Ergaster*. During the Early Acheulean all of these species are present but in the Late Acheulean they seem to have been eclipsed by other hominids such as *Homo antecessor*, *Homo erectus*, *Homo heidelbergensis*, and *Homo neanderthalensis*. Although originating in Africa, Acheulean etymology stems from Acheul, a French community where the original specimen of this tradition was discovered.

11 *Homo neanderthalensis* in Europe, *Homo erectus* in Asia, and *Homo antecessor* in Europe, Asia, and Africa. *Homo antecessor* is known as the first hominid species to inhabit Europe, Asia, and Africa simultaneously, beginning around 700,000 BP.

12 Innovation to prepared core implements was accomplished by *Heidelbergensis* and then *Neanderthal*. The species identity of the older and more refined blade makers in Africa is unknown, but is most likely sapiens. Knapping of comparative sophistication by sapiens in Europe occurs only hundreds of thousands of years later, during Cro-Magnon times.

13 Large blades are the technological hallmark of LSA Europe.

14 It can be argued that symbolic thought, especially its linguistic dimension, is not uniquely human, as it seems to be present as a communication tool and used by birds, whales, dolphins, amongst multiple other species groups. In the hominid lineage, language is also most probably not unique to sapiens as it seems obvious that most hominids would have an ability to communicate through some type of vocalizations. The use of ornamentation to attract mates amongst some bird species may also reflect symbolic thought in terms of "art".

15 Watts, I. 2015. *Revisiting Bushman pigment use in relation to human origins*. Presented at the Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, Vienna, September 2015 and Joordens, C.A. et al. 2015. 'Homo erectus at Trinil on Java used shells for tool production and engraving.' *Nature*. Vol 518. According to Watts "In a forthcoming Current Anthropology paper, the earliest pigment use will be announced, from Kathu Pan on the southern edge of the Kalahari, around half a million years ago. A nearby cave site, with similar technology, indicates that by at least 300,000 years ago, people engaged in fire-lit ritual, the performers glistening with specularite and red ochre. We argue that these sites provide the earliest evidence for group ritual, indirectly at least, associating with early evidence for campsites"

16 Hahn, J. 1993. *Aurignacian art in central Europe*. In Knecht H. et al. 1993. *Before Lascaux: the complex record of the early Upper Paleolithic*. CRC Press. Florida.

17 Henshilwood, C.S. et al. 2002. *Emergence of modern human behavior: Middle Stone Age*

engravings from South Africa. *Science* 295 and Texier P.J. et al. 2010. A Howiesons Poort tradition of engraving ostrich eggshell containers dated at 60,000 years ago at Diepkloof Rock Shelter, South Africa. *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA*.

18 Hoffecker, J. 2010. *Landscape of the mind: human evolution and the archeology of thought*. Columbia University Press.

19 Prior to 70,000 BP, the most notable cases are Late Acheulean (300,000-600,000 BP) sites in Africa and Europe found containing unusual numbers of handaxes and/or handaxes that are too large in size for practical use and some researchers have proposed these instances as evidence for ritual use of stone tools. These could be representative of isolated instances, but this certainly does not imply that humans in general at this early time were spending their energies manufacturing stone tools for ritual purposes.

20 For microblades see Brown, K.S. et al. 2012. *An early and enduring advanced technology originating 71,000 years ago in South Africa*. *Nature* 491, November 2012. For pressure flaking see Mourre, V.P. et al. 2010. *Early use of pressure flaking on lithic artifacts at Blombos Cave, South Africa*. *Science* 330. Evidence for pressure flaking in Europe does not occur until after 20,000 years ago. Pressure flaking allows a knapper to push a flake off with precision in both dimension and position on the blade, often performed with the tip of an antler tine. To reduce a core without pressure flaking, a knapper knocks off flakes with a hammer stone or bone/antler billet, with considerably less precision than allowed via pressure flaking. These techniques are complimentary and not mutually exclusive, as it is normal for knappers to transition from billeting to pressure flaking in a linear fashion during the process of producing an implement.

21 These microblades were made from silcrete, a stone that requires heat treating to allow precision chipping. Because multiple steps would be required to turn chunks of silcrete into projectile points, researchers concluded that complex thought was mandatory in their manufacture. The steps would include firing the stone, knapping it into small precision points, and hafting them to wooden shafts. See Brown, K.S. et al. 2012.

22 Tattersall, I. 2012.

23 Is significant that this transition correlates closely with the extinction of both Erectus and Neanderthal at approximately 30,000 BP?

24 Conservatively based upon the earliest known 70,000 BP symbolic artifacts attributed to Sapiens in southern Africa, while 40,000 BP marks an emergence of the initial motions towards complex symbolic cultures.

25 It is important to note that anthropology as an academic discipline generally fails to make any distinction between 'symbolic thought' and 'symbolic culture' as done here. I and other anarcho-primitivists see that it is critical to make this distinction and I hope that the reasons for this are made clear in this essay. Additionally, as I lack the space here to expand on this topic with complete context, the reader should refer to the detailed analysis and discussions regarding the ultimate consequences of symbolic culture in John Zerzan's essays *The Failure of Symbolic Thought, Language: Origin and Meaning, Number: Its Origin and Evolution, Time and its Discontents, The Case Against Art, Tonality and the Totality, Too Marvelous for Words: Language Briefly Revisited*, among his other works, and to Kevin Tucker's *The Spectacle of the Symbolic*.

26 Tattersall, I. 2012.

27 Ibid

28 There have recently been some intense discussions on the symbolic topic amongst the BAGR editorial staff and we have found that our ideas and interpretations on the matter both mesh and diverge. For now we have agreed to disagree on certain aspects. One aspect we all seem to agree on is that the symbolic topic is highly complex. The following is my own personal hypothesis on the factors which might cause symbolic culture to evolve. I am of course open to alternative views, disagreements, and critique resulting from any perceived shortcomings.

29 Fagan, B. 2010. *Cro-Magnon: How the ice age gave birth to the first modern humans*.

Four Legged Human: Written in Stone

Bloomsbury Press. New York. Also see Hoffecker, J. 2002. *Desolate landscapes: ice-age settlement in Eastern Europe*. Rutgers University Press.

30 *Ibid*. The earliest known Venus is dated to 35,000 BP. Also see Bosinski G. 1991. *The representation of female figurines in the Rhineland Magdalenian*. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 57 (pages 51-64)

31 Zilhao, J. 1993. *The spread of agro-pastoral economies across Mediterranean Europe*. *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 6 (pages 5-63).

32 Fagan, B. 2010.

33 The popularly cited example of this is the prolific occurrence of cave art across Paleolithic Europe, but as cited above the occurrence of Venus artifacts and status oriented grave goods seem to be more indicative of a shift in separation and distancing. Also note that I use the term *tribe* intentionally here because the groups in question seem to have enlarged beyond the small-band scale.

34 Bratlund, B. 1996. *Hunting strategies in the late glacial of northern Europe: a survey of the faunal evidence*. *Journal of World Prehistory* 10 (pages 1-48).

35 Fagan, B. 2010.

36 *Ibid*

37 *Ibid*

38 For archaeological evidence of hunting intensification see Bratlund, B. 1996, Fagan, B. 2010, and Stanford, D.J., and B.A. Bradley. 2013, among other works. For a thorough description of delayed return vs. immediate return economics see Woodburn, J. 1988. *African hunter gatherer social organization: is it best understood as a product of encapsulation?* In: *Hunters and Gatherers Volume 1: history, evolution, and social change*. Eds. Ingold, T., Riches, D., and J. Woodburn. Berg Publishers. Also see my essay *The commodification of wildness and its consequences in Black and Green Review*, Issue #1, Spring 2015. It is critical to make a clear distinction between the socioecological effects resulting from the type of mass-hunting described here and small-scale band-level immediate return oriented hunting. Any type of intensification in resource procurement likely first creates social consequences that overshadow ecological consequences for a time. The associated social consequences, including an evolved need for surplus and specialists to manage procurement and storage initiates an evolving delayed return psychology which requires increasing hierarchy and division of labor. This initiates feedback loops which require increasing exploitation of the ecological. It is this interplay between socioeconomic demands and ecological exploitation which eventually leads to overshoot. In the cases of hunting cultures which dabbled in this drama, the social consequences probably caught up to them well before they were able to damage ecologic systems beyond repair. Animal populations survived while the humans involved annihilated themselves socially and spiritually. For some of these groups the response to their self-imposed crises was settlement, domestication, and agriculture. It is at this stage where the ecological impacts become dire and potentially irreversible. I am not suggesting species extinction related to overkill here. See endnote #49 below.

39 For popular examples see Tainter, J.A. 1988. *Cambridge University Press* and Diamond, J. M. 2005. *Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed*. Viking.

40 Some have suggested that the finely manufactured, large, ultrathin, Solutrean 'laurel leaf' biface points which make a showing during Cro Magnon times had a symbolic function as their manufacture was "far and away more complex and difficult than any other method of flaking during the Upper Paleolithic" Stanford, D.J., and B.A. Bradley. 2013. While certainly possible, the occurrence of laurel leaf points seems far less consequential than elite grave goods as an indicator that something had gone horribly wrong.

41 Stanford, D.J., and B.A. Bradley. 2013. Note that Clovis bone artifacts decorated with zig zag or cross hatched engravings have also been found.

42 *Ibid*. Also see Meltzer, D.J. 2009. If correct, there were likely some negative consequences associated with all of this. Below, I will touch on some of these possibilities regarding possible limitations resulting from cultural dependency on exotic stone.

43 For discussions on Paleoindian ritual assemblages, red ochre, and projectile point fluting see Frison, G. 2004. *Survival by hunting: prehistoric human predators and animal prey*. University of California Press, Frison, G. C. et al. 2014. *Paleoindian red ochre mining at the Powars II site 48PL330 in southeast Wyoming*. Presented at the 72nd annual meeting of the Plains Anthropological Society. University of Arkansas, Meltzer, D.J. 2009, and Stanford, D.J., and B.A. Bradley. 2013, among many other works. Ritual use of ochre as an agent in helping to ensure the success of forthcoming hunts has recently received attention among scholars of African hunter gatherers, including the San, Hadza, and Mbuti. See Watts, I. 2015, Knight, C. and Lewis, J. 2015. *Toward a Theory of Everything*. Presented at the Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, Vienna, September 2015, and Power, C. 2015. *Reconstructing a source cosmology for African hunter-gatherers*. Presented at the Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, Vienna, September 2015.

44 Ochre also has utilitarian uses, as a wood preservative and as a stone polishing agent. Paleoindian atlatl darts have been found coated in ochre and it has also been suggested that ochre was used to dull the base of stone projectiles so as to avoid sharp edges dismantling the sinew haft.

45 One example is from Julian Steward who reported Shoshone reliance on supernatural assistance by their shamans for hunting success. Steward, J.H. 1938. *Basin-Plateau aboriginal social groups*. Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 120. Washington D.C. These were all very likely traditional practices thousands of years old, harkening all the way back to Paleoindian times, and beyond.

46 I fully recognize that ritual appeasement of animal spirits was one important dimension of Cro-Magnon symbolic praxis via their famous cave art ect. The distinction here is the archaeological evidence for division of labor and hierarchical status combined with an intensified occurrence of sophisticated symbolic artifacts in some Cro-Magnon assemblages, characteristics which are largely absent from Paleoindian assemblages and absent from known rituals of African hunter gatherers.

47 Watts, I. 2015.

48 Knight, C. and Lewis, J. 2015. Power, C. 2015, among other anthropologists, has recently posited the existence of shared structure of ritual belief centered around female blood and animal blood among African hunter gatherers that could stem all the way back to sapiens emergence and beyond. Regarding this association, Watts, I. 2015 states: "the symbolic data I've presented speaks to a metaphor that was in place more than 100,000 years ago, most probably established in our speciation. It also seems likely that this metaphor found material expression in the record of ochre use from this date. Archaeologists have reported ochre residues on Middle Stone Age stone points from around 75,000. Although they've primarily pursued possible functional roles of ochre in hafting, I suggest that a symbolic interpretation is the more likely." Interestingly, Hadza hunters have been noted to apply red pigment to hunting arrows to assist with a successful kill. In fact, some Hadza have said that if this is not done they will return without game. Also, as mentioned above, North American Paleoindian darts have been found coated in ochre. While I will not attempt to analyze the origins of symbolic thought at this depth here, I cite these works primarily to emphasize distinct differences between the use of symbolic thought by immediate return hunter gatherers and regimented, overt symbolic mediation by agriculturalists.

49 The primary argument for Clovis and other Paleoindians causing massive ecological catastrophe is 'Pleistocene overkill hypotheses via Martin, P.S. 2005. *Twilight of the mammoths: ice age extinctions and the rewilding of North America*. University of California Press. Overkill hypothesis has been thoroughly discredited, however, and most paleoarchaeologists are in agreement that the extinctions were climate change driven much more so than anthropogenic. See Meltzer, D.J. 2009 for a comprehensive knocking of the overkill hypothesis. No doubt early Paleoindians disrupted ecological systems in some manner. For example, there are documented instances of wanton waste at excavated communal kill sites. However what stands out most in the record is that their nomadic immediate return adaptation persisted for

Four Legged Human: Written in Stone

several thousand years and was practiced successfully by some non-agricultural, historical-era Native Americans up until the first stirrings of European colonization.

50 Adams, E.W.A. 1991. *Prehistoric Mesoamerica. Third Edition. University of Oklahoma Press.*

51 Meltzer, D.J. 2009 points out that analysis of artifact distribution of grave goods is a key separation point between groups with differentiation in social rank and those that were more likely egalitarian. Excavated North American Paleoindian graves yield finely crafted stone points as possible ritual burial artifacts but no major differentiation in social standing can be determined from the distribution of these implements amongst individual burials. In contrast, ritual artifact distributions in Mesoamerican tombs provide obvious evidence of extreme social stratification, as do the Gravettian graves cited above.

52 All of this is featured in Adams, E.W.A. 1991.

53 Fagan, B. 2010.

54 *Ibid*

55 See my essay *The commodification of wildness and its consequences in Black and Green Review, Issue #, Spring 2015* for discussion of the positive feedback loops which tend to evolve in relation to delayed return orientations.

56 Paraphrased from Ingold T. 2000. (*The perception of the environment: essays in livelihood, dwelling, and skill. Routledge*) as skill which is not simply technique of the body but a capability of action and perception of the whole of organic being in the context of an active engagement with the constituents of ones surroundings, inhabited by beings of manifold kinds, both human and non-human.

57 Tattersall, I. 2012.

58 Hoffecker, J. 2010.



San cave art. Photo by Four Legged Human.

DISCUSSION



Mating Imperial Moths. Photo by Yank.



Manuel DeLanda in his book, *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reasoning*, attempts to lay out a philosophical foundation to the rapidly growing field of scientific research carried out by computer simulation. This pushes beyond the limits of mathematical modeling used in theoretical sciences and has taken the place of small or even large scale experiments carried out in the physical world. The book is fairly technical and often times pretty dry, but he makes quite an effort to trace the emergence of synthetic reasoning and the book includes an appendix on “assemblage theory” which is a theory of complexity and emergence that intends to connect micro and macro level analyses of reality:

*The book begins with purely physical entities, thunderstorms, that are already complex enough to avoid the idea that their behavior can be deduced from a general law. It then moves on to explore the pre-biotic soup, bacterial ecosystems, insect intelligence, mammalian memory, primate social strategies, and **the emergence of trade, language, and institutional organizations in human communities**. Each of these layers will be discussed in terms of the mechanisms of emergence involved, drawing ideas and insights from the relevant fields of science, as well as in terms of the structure of their possibility spaces, using the results of both mathematical analysis and the outcomes of computer simulations.*

Simulations are partly responsible for the restoration of the legitimacy of the concept of emergence because they can stage

interactions between virtual entities from which properties, tendencies, and capacities actually emerge. Since this emergence is reproducible in many computers it can be probed and studied by different scientists as if it were a laboratory phenomenon. In other words, simulations can play the role of laboratory experiments in the study of emergence complementing the role of mathematics in deciphering the structure of possibility spaces. And philosophy can be the mechanism through which these insights can be synthesized into an emergent materialist world-view that finally does justice to the creative powers of matter and energy.¹

I'm going to focus on two things he brings up and then hone in on a single topic. Those two things are related to the trading of stone materials by stone-age humans and the co-evolution of stone tools and language.

...stone artifacts themselves that are our richest source of data about the way of life of our ancestors. One of the safest conclusions that can be drawn from the strata in which these deposits are arranged is their great longevity: the oldest stratigraphic sequence (the Olduvai sequence) is about one and a half million years old. Much of the content of this and other sequences is relatively uniform but as we approach more recent times the tool and debris deposits begin to diversify: the variability in tool types increases in the middle Paleolithic (two hundred and fifteen thousand to forty thousand years ago) and reaches a peak in the upper Paleolithic (forty thousand to ten thousand years ago).²

Variability in tool and debris deposits is evidence not only of the progressive differentiation of skills but also of cultural enrichment within communities and even of contact between different communities. The latter follows from the fact that good quality stone was not always available locally so that it had to be imported.³

What is not clear is whether the long-distance movement of flint and other materials was effected through some form of trade or by another mechanism. One possibility is that the movement began with a traveling delegation carrying an offering that was then entrusted to a variety of intermediary communities none of which ever left its own territory. This would imply that some

form of cooperation between different communities had become stable enough to support such a multi-staged transport mechanism but, as was argued in the previous chapter, the stability of cooperation is hard to achieve within a single community let alone between several different ones. So trade remains a possibility even if it involved only a very primitive form of barter with no clear conception of profits.⁴

The production of stone tools gives us a primitive economy based on the raw material of different stone types. Stone Age human communities had to develop a knowledge of raw materials (different stone types), where they were and how to shape this raw material into the desired tool:

*If habits promoting cooperation constituted the first form of human cultural content transmitted across generations, the manual skills involved in the manufacture of stone tools greatly enriched this cultural heritage. The distinction between habits and skills is like that between tendencies and capacities: habits are repetitive and limited in variation while skills are more flexible and open ended. Like all capacities to affect skills must be adapted to a capacity to be affected: percussion blows must aim for cracks or fractures; edges must be created in a rigid stone capable of holding on to a shape; flaking operations must be applied to fine-grained stone; production of large tools must use rocks of the right dimensions. Both manual skills and the complex procedures to which they gave rise are certainly older than spoken language suggesting that **the hand may have taught the mouth to speak**, that is, that ordered series of manual operations may have formed the background against which ordered series of vocalizations first emerged.⁵*

Nicholas Carr, in his book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, writes about rewiring the brain based on technological conditioning and external stimulation. His book largely deals with the outsourcing of human memory to a machine and our resultant addiction to instant gratification involved with information readily at our fingertips. In his book, the map and the clock are big technological products that directly changed the way humans experience life. It gave them an abstract view of things beyond their immediate senses. **Could the linear process of shaping a rock into a preconceived form be the first step towards symbolic thought?**

Endnotes

1 Manuel DeLanda. *Philosophy and Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011. Pg. 6.

2 DeLanda, Pg. 128.

3 DeLanda, Pg. 129.

4 DeLanda, Pgs. 129-130.

5 DeLanda, Pg. 129.



Symbolic culture, the defining feature of modern humans, is quite recent; while non-symbolic culture--and intelligence--go back very much farther. About 30,000 years for the former, 3 million years in terms of the latter. I've addressed this before, most recently in "The Way We Used to Be,"¹ and the following is largely an extension or update of that essay.

Contra Henry de Lumley, the symbolic is not "one of the essential dimensions of human cognition."² We are the only human species to symbolize, and yet cognition certainly extends to our very, very distant forbears. We are symbolic animals, living within layers of symbolic representations where nothing is allowed to be merely itself. This conceit defines reality in countless ways. Consciousness, for example, can only take place within the symbolic. Erich Neumann sees the origin of consciousness in myth, to cite one baseless example.³

Communication cannot be properly said to take place unless it is symbolic. Michael Haworth has explored "Telepathy and Intersubjectivity in Derrida, Husserl and Levinas,"⁴ and Freud had no trouble assuming that early humans were telepathic.⁵ The cognition that enables expertise is not usually reliant on the symbolic, including language. We are slowly discovering more about the richness of

pre-symbolic culture, including ever-earlier examples of Paleolithic intelligence.

Culture in the widest sense is far from solely possessed by humans. A fine reminder is *The Cultural Lives of Whales and Dolphins* by Hal Whitehead and Luke Rendell,⁶ about cetaceans who think, feel, and live communally in a web of culture developed about 30 million years ago.

Concerning our own family tree, in the beginning there were the hominin species (e.g. *Ardipithecus*, *Australopithecus*) and the *Homo* species. We were fully bipedal this side of 6 million years ago, but not yet “human.” A fairly recent *Ardipithecus ramidus* find is a fossilized skeleton nicknamed “Ardi” who lived about 4.4 million years ago; a more famous ancestor is “Lucy” from 3.4 million years ago. Much debate continues as to the earliest appearance of humans (e.g. *Homo erectus*, *Homo habilis*).⁷



In March 2015 Kaye Reed of Arizona State University and her colleagues reported finding the oldest *Homo* fossil, dating back 2.8 million years, found in Ethiopia.⁸ In June of the same year there was another Ethiopian find, half of a jawbone, dated from 3.3 to 3.5 million years. The latest evidence fuels the hominin vs. *Homo* discussion, but also raises questions as to the adequacy of those distinctions. “It makes us stop and rethink everything,” said American paleoanthropologist Carol V. Ward.⁹

The fact that some extremely old fossilized remains have distinctly human features (e.g. shape of hands or feet, arm length)¹⁰ only deepens the confusion, but the extent of cognitive capacities is a question of still greater significance.

Analysis of stone tools found near Lake Turkana, Kenya in 2011

verifies that they are 3.3 million years old, some 700,000 years earlier than those previously known.¹¹ The earliest previous evidence of tool-making, also from east Africa, was dated 2.6 m.y.a. A similar, supportive find is that of bones from before 3.39 m.y.a. “that show unambiguous stone-tool cut marks for flesh removal and percussion marks for marrow access.”¹² The fashioning of even the simplest of stone tools is a feat of mind not exhibited by non-human primates even when trained by humans.¹³ Much of what we know is extrapolated from the evidence of stone tools; they are artifacts that endure. There was likely a wealth of other activity whose traces have disappeared, e.g. woodworking, bone and antler tools, cordage from similar periods.

We know that *Homo erectus* managed repeated sea crossings to the Indonesian island of Flores, a distance of at least 20 kilometers.¹⁴ The discovery of 500,000-year-old stone-tipped spears in South Africa upset the long-standing opinion that such hafting was unknown before 300,000 years ago.¹⁵

The evidence record shows a clear pattern of developed abilities at ever-earlier times. Other recent findings support this, including a *Journal of Human Evolution* article that focuses on cooking at around 1.9 million years ago.¹⁶ It discusses scavenged meat, arguing that *Homo erectus* would not have emerged without cooking. Eating carrion, which clearly took place at least this early, would not have been safe unless the meat was cooked. Ewen Calloway looks at 1.5 mya human footprints in Kenya as evidence of an early antelope hunt.¹⁷ A September 2015 sensation was the announcement of a new species, *Homo naledi*, found in South Africa and dating from 2.5 to 2.8 mya. Of unusually modern appearance and possibly practicing deliberate burial vastly earlier than any known symbolic activity.¹⁸

We were beings who lived in direct touch with this Earth while avoiding the virus of symbolic pseudo-life, domestication, and civilization—but not for want of intelligence. Our species is unique, mainly in a negative sense, having brought ruin and estrangement to every corner of the world.

Women as Paleolithic tool-makers¹⁹ brings to mind another dimension of hunter-gatherer band society. A 2011 study of 32 hunter-gatherer groups overturned an earlier assumption that such groups were composed mainly of people who were genetically related. Anthropologists Mark Dyble and Andrea Migliano found that most of them were not related, and that the level of non-relatedness increased with the level of gender equality in the band. They attributed the well-known band features of egalitarianism and cooperation to the

conscious influence of women,²⁰ a powerful reply to those who have characterized references to hunter-gatherer gender equality as an illusory modern/ Romantic/leftist projection.

I think pre-domesticated life may remain an intriguing mystery in many, if not most respects. The perspectives it has already revealed, however, may be of profound importance in the always-worsening straits where Progress places us.

Endnotes

1 "The Way We Used to Be," in John Zerzan, *Future Primitive Revisited* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2012), pp. 110-124.

2 "The Emergence of Symbolic Thought," Colin Renfrew and Iain Morley, eds., *Becoming Human: Innovation in Prehistoric Material and Spiritual Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 10.

3 Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

4 Michael Haworth, "Telepathy and Intersubjectivity in Derrida, Husserl and Levinas," *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 45:3 (2014).

5 Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1933), p. 55.

6 Hal Whitehead and Luke Rendell, *The Cultural Lives of Whales and Dolphins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

7 John Gurche, *Shaping Humans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 126. Also Fred Spoor, "Paleoanthropology: The Middle Pliocene Gets Crowded," *Nature* 521 (27 May 2015).

8 Villmoare, Brian, et. Al., "Early Homo at 2.8 Ma from Ledi-Geraru, Ethiopia," *Science* 347 (12 June 2015).

9 Carl Zimmer, "Bones to Pick on Evolution," *New York Times*, June 2, 2015.

10 Russell H. Tuttle, *Apes and Human Evolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 248.

11 John Noble Willford, "Stone Tools from Kenya Are Oldest Yet Discovered," *New York Times*, May 20, 2015.

12 S.P. McPherron et. al., "Evidence for Stone-Tool-Assisted Consumption of Animal Tissues Before 3.39 mya at Dikika, Ethiopia," *Nature* 466 (12 August 2011).

13 Gurche, *op.cit.*, p. 124.

14 Robert G. Bednarik, "Replicating the First Known Sea Travel by Humans: the Lower Pleistocene Crossing of the Lombok Strait," *Journal of Human Evolution*, 16:3 (2001).

15 Jayne Wilkins et. al., "Stone-tipped Spears Lethal, May Indicate Early Cognitive and Society Skills," *Science News*, August 27, 2014.

16 Alex R. Smith et.al., "The Significance of Cooking for Early Hominid Scavenging," *Journal of Human Evolution* 84 (July 2015).

17 Ewen Calloway, "Homo erectus Footprints Hint at Ancient Hunting Party," *Nature*, 17 April 2015.

18 Paul H G M Dirks et.al., "Geological and taphonomic context for the new hominin species Homo naledi from the Dinaledi Chamber, South Africa." Lee R. Berger et.al., "Homo naledi, a new species of the genus Homo from the Dinaledi Chamber, South Africa." Both articles in *eLife*, September 10, 2015.

19 Nyree Findlay, "Gender and Lithic Studies in Prehistoric Archaeology," Diane Bolger, ed., *A Companion to Gender Prehistory* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

20 M. Dyle et. al., "Sex Equality Can Explain the Unique Social Structure of Hunter-Gatherer Bands," *Science* 348, 7 June 2015.



Note: The following is in part a response to the essays on symbolic thought from Cliff, John, and Four Legged Human in this issue, but it is also to clarify based off of the intense discussions that we were having as editors to draw this subject out. It is an unending question and, in large part, based off of speculation in some regards and substantial clarity in others. So while the particulars may be contentious, we all end up at the same place: there is no substitute for direct experience and immersion with wildness.

“Language,” writes John Zerzan, “like ideology, mediates the here and now, attacking direct, spontaneous connections.”¹ That essay, ‘Language: Origin and Meaning’, sought to raise questions about the depths of domestication. Yet since its publication in 1984, that sentiment has been considered as a declaration of the anarcho-primitivist critique of civilization.

The line of questioning that Zerzan set upon lied in an upheaval of biological and philosophical assertions about something that has plagued domesticated humans since we started removing ourselves from the community of the wild: what does it mean to be human? Scientists and philosophers, like all historians, seek to write the autobiography of the conquerors. If we are to take pride in our so-called achievements, then there must be purpose.

The Ideology of Progress takes many forms, but it has a strong lineage. The world of the nomadic hunter-gatherer, engaged and a part of the world around them, is etched into our bones. This way of life changed the way that our brains take in information, the way our eyes see and ears hear. The sensations of foliage brushing against our limbs or the feeling of running a hand through the fur of a deceased animal connect us. They make us aware. They make us a part of this unending whole. They ground us within our wider context.

As some hunter-gatherers settled around a surplus of wild grains or proteins, or as they began to spend longer times at camps built around early gardens, that relationship changed. This happened very slowly, likely to the point of being imperceptible unless viewed in terms of generations. One of the first indicators of this shift was the emergence of shamans²; interpreters of a creeping delayed return economy of reliance upon stored grains or proteins. It is this interpretation that led to symbolic culture: the point at which humans began interacting with the world as a separate entity.

I want to emphasize a distinction that is seemingly unique to the anarcho-primitivist critique: to draw out that difference between symbolic thought and symbolic culture.³ Often amongst anthropologists, philosophers and the like, the terms are used almost interchangeably. For the purposes of understanding where abstraction ends and alienation begins, it's important to make that separation. As such, *symbolic thought* may refer to specific means of communication and interaction, like language and art, but I use *symbolic culture* to refer to cultures that are driven by symbolic mediation: where life itself is interpreted and experienced through a culturally defined lens. That is seeing the world through the lens of the symbolic, a steadily increasing mediation between life and the living. In the extreme, you have the nomadic hunter-gatherer taking in stimuli of all forms of life and partaking in them on one hand and you have a social networked First World inhabitant engaged through hand held machines on the other. We outsource our perception.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that in terms of the symbolic, a caveat is in order. I personally use the terms *representation*, *symbol* and *abstraction* fairly interchangeably. Other writers have used mediation loosely along the lines of a fill-in for any of those words, which I strongly reject. Abstraction, for example, represents something that is not immediately present: a placeholder of sorts, but it does not require objectification in and of itself. *Mediation*, as it is widely used in terms of social relationships, implies a moderated relationship that creates a psychological distance. Mediation is the necessary precursor of *alienation*, or the ability to be completely removed from a situation, physically and psychologically.

These distinctions become far clearer throughout the increasing complexity of symbolic life. As such, they might come off as unnecessary nuance, but coming from an incredibly alienated society where almost all interactions are carried through hyper-mediating technologies, we need a reminder that our much lauded intellect and capacity for language is only one sensory input amongst many.

The Problem of Searching for Uniqueness

Symbolic thought is often a topic that has nagged at me. In terms of understanding the origins of civilization and the depths of domestication, I've found the speculation behind the critique of the symbolic to be less definitive than mounds of evidence about the consequences of domestication.

As a cultural materialist it is clear to me that modes of procurement and interactions with other societies do more to shape our relationships with each other and the world around us. Sedentism, the settling of nomadic societies, is definitive. Surplus, the storage of wild or cultivated grains and proteins, is definitive. Horticulture, the use of forest gardens, and pastoralism, controlling herd migrations of domesticated animals, are definitive.

We have untold examples of these societies and how they respond to the innate needs of the human-animal in terms of domestication. We can see how numerous examples of symbolic thought; time, number, history, industry, and capital, for example, arise in a historic sense. Accounting comes with storage. Politics come with the distribution of culminated food.

The quest to understand human origins tends to focus on two other forms of symbolic thought: language and art. The reason is obvious: the traditions that emerge and the means to relay them are spoken, danced, preached, built, drawn and carved. Language and art appear to be the means by which civilization, something that has no precedent in the wild world, are carried by.

There is a gaping hole here that both the fans and enemies of civilization have filled: language (and to a lesser degree, art) is what makes us human. Language is what we believe makes us unique.

But there's a big problem here. Unlike other forms of symbolic thought, language didn't make us unique. From my experience, language isn't unique to humans (that includes all ancestors and relatives of *Homo Sapiens*) at all.

Likewise, one undeniable thread that ties our grounded nomadic hunter-gatherer ancestors and relatives to our civilized existence is that we all communicate using language. Language, in and of itself, is clearly not the source of our mediation. That language becomes the carrier of disconnected worlds is not a reason to condemn it. Language equally takes part in connecting individuals with the world. Art and ritual, to use very broad terms, do the same.

Cultures create language and languages shape and perpetuate cul-

tures. The degree to which language limits our interactions with the world is driven more by the disregard for all other senses and awareness. More to the point: English isn't what is keeping you from having a relationship with the wild, the alienation inherent in this culture is.

Our understanding of what constitutes language comes from the primacy of conquest. The more civilized we are, the more we are reliant upon this singular sensory input. Reinforced by the written word and quantified world, our perceptions and interactions with the world at large are flattened. English, a great example of a removed and lifeless language, has extremely developed laws and principles of application. I'm using it as an example here, but it is just one language coming from a long line of colonizer's tongues. When we are talking about language, we are extrapolating from our own perceptions and extending them into the past. We use our own experience as the yard stick to gauge human-ness and look for reflections of our own systems to draw out how language is used by other societies, mediated or not.

To do so, we must remove the crucial context that separates how 21st century Americans use language from that of nomadic hunter-gatherers. In this backwards glance, we presume that language, the use of symbolic thought, requires mediation. From that point we kind of free fall through a number of other assumptions about our universalized "uniqueness".

The Blue Jay at the Bird Feeder

Noam Chomsky is widely considered a father of modern linguistics. The work that he and his colleagues have undertaken has been crucial in the development of Artificial Intelligence. It is based in a notion of human uniqueness that lends itself easily to a god complex. The irony of pointing and decoding our uniqueness so that we might program and replicate it is often lost.

For Chomsky, language is what makes humans unique. What separates language from the communication of other animals is grammar. Grammar, in the linguistic sense, is the innate rules of language. It is the form that determines the function of language. It makes it so we can discuss in abstracts, to talk about things that are not currently present. By this definition, *Homo Sapiens* are the sole users of grammar.

Or at least that is what we think.

The problem with grammar is that it implies a structure that reflects our own perceptions. Animal communication, when granted at all, is permissible so long as it is within context. Experts on bird lan-

guage, like naturalist Jon Young, seemingly disagree.

"In bird language," Young writes, "the songs are not enough."⁴ The reduction of language, of complex communication, is based off of our own perceptions about how it differs from our own unique methods. We don't call it language solely because we don't understand it on the levels that hunter-gatherers and indigenous societies do. As we will see, Young's "Cacophony of Harmony", or the songs of the forest, created human language just as it has shaped the language of all beings.

There are numerous examples that I think counter assertions that language is uniquely human. If I have learned anything through re-wilding it is that our uniqueness is greatly overstated and our understanding of the world around us and, most importantly, its interconnectedness through a civilized lens is slim to none. We transpose our perceptions and biases.

We know, for example, that the songs of whales are constantly changing and growing in complexity. We know that bird language, much like our own, is inseparable from other senses and behaviors. What Young has shown repeatedly is that the ways in which bird language communicates extremely detailed information: what is going on, who is coming, who is going, where they're headed. They carry the mood of strangers and prowlers in the forest. Typically that is information that has been understood as relying on an abstract conceptualization. The distance of predators, the presence of potential threats, and the relative sense of danger that they might convey are all things that birds pass on. And all other beings rely on them for that spread of news. This is piled on top of the far more elaborate world of each bird's own songs, including regional dialects and inclusion of external sounds. Elaborate rituals, including dance and ornate displays, are also common, if not universal.

Chomsky very well might indicate that this is not language. That the rules of grammar are imperceptible to us, therefore they don't exist. I don't believe this to be true. And there's one experience that immediately comes to mind: hearing the repeated and imperfect cry of a Red Tailed Hawk. The call of the Red Tail is an iconic sound, even hilariously misapplied by Hollywood to most birds of prey. But in this particular instance, it's not quite right. The reason: this isn't a Red Tailed Hawk at all, it's a young Blue Jay.

Blue Jays are able to mimic sounds; this includes the call of the Red Tail. The reason why they would is clear: upon hearing that tell tale cry, songbirds flee. As regular prey for these hawks, that's a pretty understandable move. Bird feeders draw those songbirds in and predators aren't unaware of this. Being fairly out in the open keeps them on their

toes. Blue Jays, having observed the panic that a Red Tail induces, have also observed how this results in clearing out the feeder.

All of this can be explained in terms of non-symbolic communication so far. I believe more is at play here, but regardless, there's one point that is sticking: the sound of a Blue Jay *practicing* the call. This single instance requires layers of abstraction: knowing that the call of the Red Tail clears the feeder, that the Blue Jay can mimic it, and, that away from both the initiated exchange and the final result, this process needs perfection to work.

Chomsky's argument is that grammar, that ability to think and communicate in abstraction, is the underlying principle of language. So if all language is symbolic thought, then we have to accept that this Blue Jay is exhibiting the usage of symbolic thought.

I don't make this point lightly. But my goal here isn't to prove that all animals are human, but to reiterate that all humans are animals. Uniqueness is a delusion of grandeur, a fairy tale that we tell ourselves so that our mediation comes as a gift rather than a burden. This is the basis of civilized thought, the central message of domestication. By emphasizing one means of communication, we atrophy our senses; we disregard our place within the grounded world.

As Paul Shepard observes:

"A million species constantly 'make assumptions' in their body language, indicating a common ground and the validity of their responses. A thousand million pairs of eyes, antennae, and other sense organs are fixed on something beyond themselves that sustains their being, in a relationship that works. To argue that because we interpose talk or pictures between us and this shared immanence, and that it therefore is meaningless, contradicts the testimony of life itself. The nonhuman realm, acting as if in common knowledge of a shared quiddity, of unlike but congruent representations, tests its reality billions of times every hour. It is the same world in which we ourselves live, experiencing it as a process, structures, and meanings, interacting with the same events that the plants and other animals do."⁵

The ideology of Uniqueness is our burden, but it is a burden we can ultimately relieve ourselves of.

Language Makes Us Animals

The presumption of grammar as unique presents another problem. If grammar is uniquely human and all humans have a natural tendency

for language, as Chomsky and Steven Pinker argue, then the Pirahã represent a big question.

The Pirahã are hunter-gatherers living in the Amazon Forest in central Brazil. Their language is unique in that it was previously believed that they had almost no grammar, or at least no apparent rules of grammar. As a linguist and former missionary, Daniel Everett took up the challenge of trying to understand their language to translate the Bible. Ultimately it was a failure, but through trying to get inside the language and culture, Everett himself, in a sense, became converted. The Pirahã live without numbers and time, making them a prime example amongst other hunter-gatherers for understanding life without symbolic culture.

Lacking the kind of rigid grammar rules that Chomsky and Pinker established, Everett found that the reason their language functions so well and the Pirahã are as capable as anyone of relaying complex thoughts is because their language is enmeshed in the forest. Their world is not separated. As Everett states:

“...there is nothing primitive about the Pirahãs cognitive abilities. There is nothing bizarre about them or their language. Rather, their language and grammar perfectly fit their esoteric culture.”⁶

This is an important point, language, in and of itself, can be used to fuse a culture to its place.

Within our wild context, language may be no different for us than the songs of the birds. Unfortunately that is a threshold that Everett himself was unable to cross. Echoing the bias of the uniqueness of humans, he states:

“This layered organization of human speech is what enables us to communicate so much more than any other species, given our larger, but still finite, brains.”⁷

This notion of correlating brain size and function has received another challenge: the recent find of the *Homo Neladi*, a hominid relative of *Homo Sapiens*. The discovery of 15 *Neladi* bodies deep within a cave had all of the indications of ritualistic burial. This was a move of deliberation, but also a move that had been previously understood as almost uniquely human. That is to say, this is behavior that had been previously linked to the kind of culture only made possible by larger brains.

Their culture, on the face of it, likely resembled the nomadic hunt-

er-gatherer cultures that take us further and further back down the timeline of human evolution. And the kicker: the *Neladi* had much smaller brains. As it stands, we have no way to identify the age of these bones, but the finding serves to show the level of ambiguity we have to hold about our own timelines. And our own biases. If our uniqueness is such a thin line and based on something as speculative as when we were able to start using grammar and as underwhelming as our case that other animals don't use it, then that is ambiguity that we should embrace. The wall between human and animal has and should crumble.

The response to the *Neladi* finds shows this to be true:

*"The notion of such a small-brained creature exhibiting such complex behavior seems so unlikely that many other researchers have simply refused to credit it."*⁸

As we begin to unwind this fallacy, then perhaps our understanding of human language needs to incorporate its likeliness to the language of other beings rather than set out to defy it. Singing, for example, plays a constant and central role in hunter-gatherer life. Among the Huaorani, hunter-gatherers of Ecuador, Laura Rival observed the central role of chanting. They "usually chant several hours a day when resting in their hammocks or when busy with some home-based activity."⁹ The lyrical content is relatively arbitrary: often just narrating the task at hand, particularly the mundane ones. That's something I think many of us can relate to.

Amongst the Mbuti, songs are considered a part of the chorus of the forest. In a place where depth of vision is limited, sound is amplified. The songs of the Mbuti work with Young's "Cacophony of Harmonies". Colin Turnbull noted that their song patterns had more complexity than classical music, but also that their songs were so enmeshed with their forest context, that when those melodies carried into the village, they were considered "empty sound" or, put bluntly, "noise".¹⁰

Anthropologist Jerome Lewis, also working amongst the BaYaka, elaborated further by arguing that singing shaped language.¹¹ That through replicating the songs of the forest, we came to form our own communication in unison with our surroundings. That musicality brings to mind Hugh Brody's observation that the Khoisan language of the hunting and gathering San contains 140 separate pieces of sound. Contrast that with English that uses about 40 pieces of sound.¹²

It very well may be that we can continue to further our delineations or that human language is truly unique. But I find that search to be so

doused in speculation about when humans changed that I think it's more immediate to show how humans haven't changed. Circumstances, absolutely. Clearly symbolic culture has taken part in furthering the behemoth of civilization. Clearly our lives of isolation and alienation have taken us to dire extremes.

But it is also undeniable that language will remain a part of our path back home. I would argue further that a deeper understanding of language and its correlates through the wild world will help awaken our senses. That a widened sense of language and awareness will help us find our animality again.

Ultimately it is that primal animality that no alienation can endure.

ENDNOTES

1 John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*. Columbia, MO: CAL Press, 1999. Pg 35.

2 This is a point I will elaborate through upcoming essays for *Black and Green Review*, but I see an important distinction that a number of anthropologists can be sloppy about: attributing "healer" roles to "shamans". Unlike shamans, healers are not specialized. Noted amongst the Kung of the Kalahari, Richard Katz found that by adulthood, "more than half the men and 10 percent of the women have become healers." *Boiling Energy*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982. Pg 35.

3 For more on this, see my 'Spectacle of the Symbolic' in *For Wildness and Anarchy*. Greensburg, PA: Black and Green Press, 2010. Drawing out this critique of the symbolic was also the focus of *Species Traitor* no 3 (2004).

4 Jon Young, *What the Robin Knows*. Boston: Mariner, 2013. Pg 1.

5 Paul Shepard, *Traces of an Omnivore*. Washington DC: Island Press, 1996. Pg 162.

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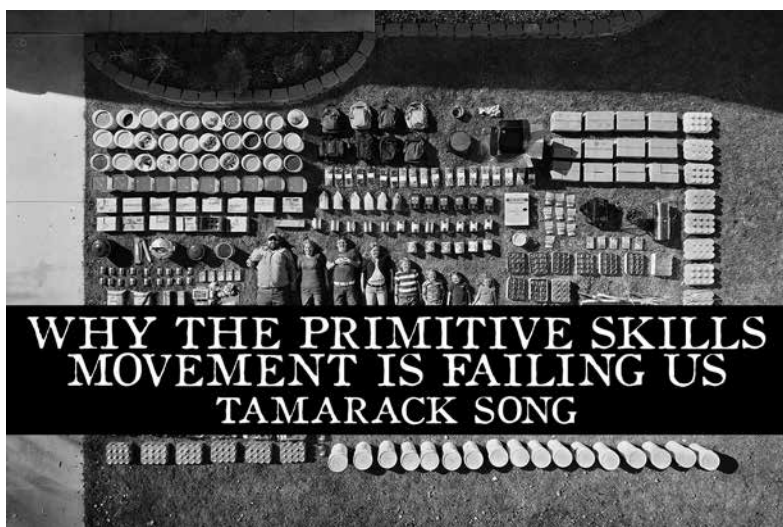
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WHY THE PRIMITIVE SKILLS MOVEMENT IS FAILING US TAMARACK SONG

The modern primitive skills movement began in 1967 with the publication of Larry Dean Olson's book, *Outdoor Survival Skills* (Brigham Young University Press, Provo). Larry's approach, which was both hands-on and respectful of the traditions from which the skills came, soon drew a group of followers. They came from across the country, and they included a young Tom Brown, Jr. and many others.

Other developments were afoot that found resonance with these early primitivists: the back-to-the-land movement, the counter-culture, the environmental movement, the outdoor recreation movement (particularly as reflected in adventure-challenge schools such as Outward Bound and National Outdoor Leadership School). Along with them came a healthy dose of American Indian mysticism and the wilderness ethics of John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and others.

The fertile mix struck a sympathetic chord in the hearts of many. Books appeared by the dozen, from folksy, self-published efforts to full-blown commercial ventures complete with hired publicists and national advertising. Schools sprang up by the hundreds and reflected the same spread as the books: from a couple of friends getting together on weekends to offer plant walks and basic skills instruction to full-time commercial operations giving their owners six and seven figure incomes.

It's been nearly two generations since the primitive skills movement's heartfelt homespun beginnings, and what do we have? First and foremost, we have inherited a definition of what constitutes living primitively—mastering the following five core survival skills:

- Shelter
- Fire
- Water
- Plants
- Animals

They just happen to be the five core chapters of Larry's *Outdoor Survival Skills*, along with having become the format for virtually every primitive skills school across America, Europe, and Australia, from the biggest to the smallest.

This fact begs two questions:

- Are those actually the five core skills that Native peoples find necessary for survival?
- Did Larry intend the “learn these five skills and you can live like a Native” approach?

Regarding the first question, I do not know of a single individual or group that has been able to survive in the wilderness for any period of time by relying on those five skills. They fail because the Native Way is based on relationship rather than technology. For a Native, physical skills and expertise are outgrowths of relationship, rather than the other way around. A relatively minor part of Native people's lives—only a few hours a day—is devoted to technology, and even that revolves around relationship. Without functional and balanced relationships with their inner selves, their clan, their circle of relations (the wingeds, leggeds, scaled and leafed), and the earth and sky realms, Natives suffer and eventually, no matter how proficient their skills.

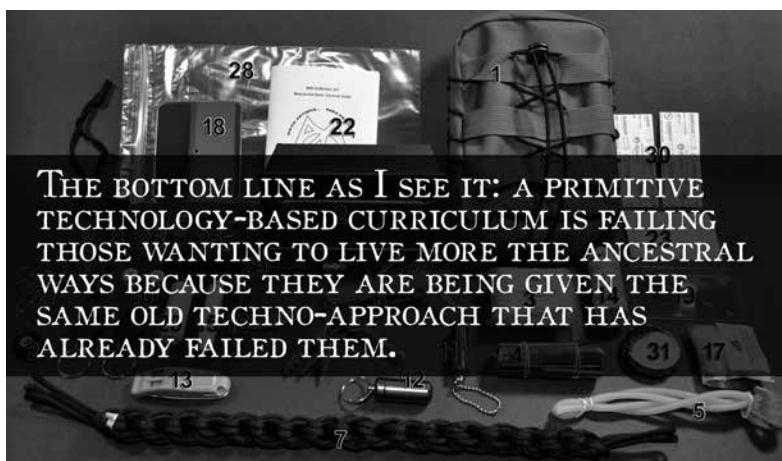
As for whether the technology-based approach was intended by Larry, in *Outdoor Survival Skills* he talks about the Anasazi way. If you were to read his book or talk with him in person, you would know it to imply a way of being as much or more so than a way of doing. The foreword, prologue, and entire first chapter of the book are devoted to relationship, and the thread of relationship is woven throughout the book. I believe the five-core-skill approach to living in balance was unintended by Larry.

Then why has the five-skill approach taken such a strong hold of the primitive skills movement? Because we can see only what we have eyes for. Western culture adores technology, and we are the culture's children. Well-meaning instructors will naturally teach physical skills as though they were the cornerstone of living natively—they have faith in the myth of the five core skills. Very few instructors have had the opportunity to live natively for a period of time, or to live with

Song: Why the Primitive Skills Movement is Failing Us

Native people, so they cannot see through the myth. Instead, they have been taught by people, who have been taught by yet other people, who believed in the core-skill way.

I say “believed” because their teaching approach was not based on experience—they did not find out firsthand what does and doesn’t work. If they did, they would know that core-skills proficiency in wilderness situations goes hand-in-hand with proficiency in lifeway skills. Not knowing how to live with biting insects, find direction, forecast weather, maintain hygiene, administer first aid, or meet nutritional needs—not to mention critical awareness and group dynamic skills—is like having a car without a road to drive it on. Survival, as well as long-term wilderness living, will be difficult if not impossible.



However, it’s not just the books and videos that perpetuate the myth. Many of us take classes that teach the core skills, and we practice them every chance we get. Just like the instructors, authors, and video producers, we come from a technological culture, so we naturally assume that substituting primitive technology for modern technology is the way to becoming a Native.

When our approach to native living is technologically rather than relationally based, we tend to approach the natural realm as users. We view our surroundings as commodities, which separates us from the plants and animals, waters and minerals. No matter how much we might like to embrace them as sisters and brothers, we have created a world for them that is separate than ours—we call it *nature*.

The bottom line as I see it: a primitive technology-based curriculum is failing those wanting to live more the ancestral ways because they

are being given the same old techno-approach that has already failed them. If only they were able to see through the glitzy new wrapping. If only us old timers back in the 70s had embraced the first 18 pages of *Outdoor Survival Skills* as passionately as the rest of the book.

I know people who have tried for decades to make the techno-approach work. Some of them have eventually given up, saying that they didn't have it in them, that they should have started when they were younger, or that you just plain can't go back. Yet others have persisted, believing in their hearts that the approach is solid and will eventually click for them.

The allure of primitive skills will keep the movement rolling along as-is until we recognize that what we long for deep in our marrow is a *primitive relationship movement*. With a few changes, we can have it. Then we will have a doorway to wilderness that we can step through and *know* that we are home.

The beauty of the kinship approach is that there is nothing new to learn—it's already programmed in our DNA. What we do need to do is peel off the layers of conditioning that have kept us isolated, self-protective, and consumer-focused. Our intrinsic relationship-focused selves will then come bursting forth, as though they were just released from under the crushing snows of a long winter.

Oh, and about those core survival skills: when we are in right relationship, the skills come so much quicker and easier than if we were to try mastering them cold turkey. And they'll actually work when we need them. When I am in relationship with sister deer, she comes to meet my arrow. I no longer have to grub and hope—often in vain—for a spooky animal to shoot at. It's like embracing the warmth rather than fighting the cold, like being shown the direction rather than living in fear getting lost. In short, I am being taken care of, rather than having to struggle for survival. Natives intrinsically know this, because they live it. And we can also—we can bring it from the realm of fairy tale to reality by studying with the best primitive relationship instructors: wind and squirrel and the ancestral voices that speak from within. Come and we will meet out where your nature is nature.

Tamarack Song is the founder of Teaching Drum Outdoor School, a school and community built around rewilding and overcoming the domestication process. He is also the author of Journey to the Ancestral Self and Entering the Mind of the Tracker.

FIELD NOTES FROM THE PRIMAL WAR



Pickerel frog. Photo by Yank.

True Crime Case Files: Fiber Optic Cable Attack

FOR
EDUCATIONAL
PURPOSES
ONLY

When: 2014–2015

Location: San Francisco, CA

“It is not hard to imagine that a few individuals might be able to locate individual vulnerable fibers and choose attacks to maximize network disruption.”

– macro magnon. *Species Traitor no 4*, 2005.¹

The idea of a wireless society is a presumption, an illusion. WiFi signals permeate the air, but those signals are coming from routers, from networks. The spread of and expectation for constant access is carried in smartphones, tablets, laptops and whatever wearable devices exist or await their markets. Connected as these devices may be, they only play on the notion of decentralization.

The Cloud remains heavily tethered.

Fiber optic cables are a horrifically efficient means of carrying an almost infinite amount of data at inhuman speeds. But they are also fragile and expensive. And, notably, buried in plain sight. This makes them particularly vulnerable.

As of July 1, 2015, the FBI was investigating a string of at least 11 attacks on fiber optic cables in San Francisco within the previous year. The last attack in that string, according to a spokesperson of internet provider Wave Broadband was “coordinated”². The attackers snuck into an underground vault and cut three fiber optic cables, the FBI refused to give an indication of how large the impact area was, but other incidents seem to indicate that a single line in an urban area can support thousands if not tens of thousands of connections. In more densely populated areas, that number will increase exponentially.

Fiber optic cables are essentially thin cables of glass wires transmitting light waves. Those cables are about as thick as a pencil. Their protection lies in a hefty conduit covering the cables, but their locations aren’t hidden. The buried lines are marked under the Federal

“Call Before You Dig” registry.³ The reason is obvious: damage to these cables occurs accidentally and intentionally, both with equal results.

The cables are not easily cut, but they are not invincible. Clearly a backhoe could cause a massive amount of damage, and quite often they do. By pulling the lines with great force, the result could be a break in the line upwards of a mile away from the point of impact, making repairs incredibly difficult to do efficiently.

Accidents, however, are not keeping security firms, corporations and governments up at night. Intentional attacks are. According to a USA Today study from March of 2015, cyber or physical attacks against the national grid occur about once every four days.⁴ The constant and ever present connectivity that Modernity has been selling clearly has its opponents.

The response to these attacks has been nothing short of pulling the “terrorist” card. The disruption of data is a matter of national security. It is treated as life threatening, but what is at stake here? Business as usual. That is literally all. Fiber optic cables aren’t powering life support systems for your relatives, they are carrying crucial business information, collecting your personal data, and ensuring that you are looking at screens instead of admiring the increasingly wireless views above ground. They are necessary for telecommunications. That is it. No life is harmed in their dismantling. Yet the discussion and fear mongering surrounding their defense indicate how central that constant connection is to this fragile reality.

And fragile it shall remain.

If you look carefully at the emperor’s selfie, it is apparent that they have no clothes.

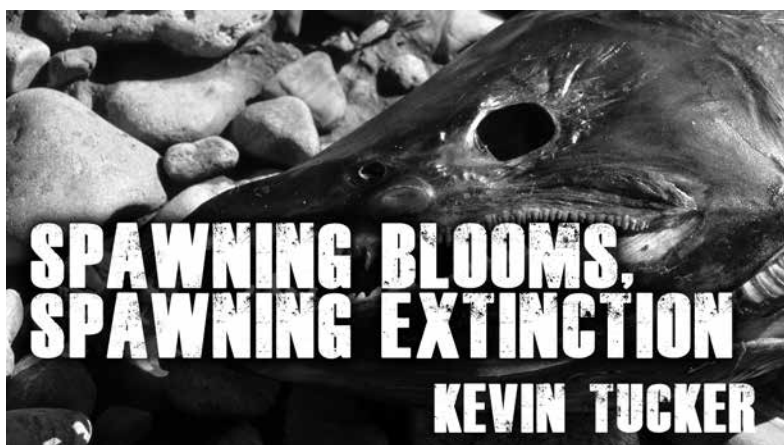


Endnotes

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2 <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2015/06/30/california-internet-outage/29521335/>
3 call811.com

4 <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/03/24/power-grid-physical-and-cyber-attacks-concern-security-experts/24892471/>



It should be frightening enough to hear the President of the United States proclaim that we're "the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it". But the reality is worse. Far worse than any politician can openly discuss and certainly beyond what any of them would be willing to do.

Though Obama might feel that we are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change, he is sorely wrong. We should be no strangers to the consequences of civilization. Industrialism didn't create long term ecological catastrophe, it just amplified the catastrophes that agriculture brought. And that amplification has been exponential.

The lingering fear, however, is that for an unending and growing list of species, this generation might be the last. Or, at the very least, many of them are quickly heading that way.

For the West Coast of the United States, that's becoming a daily reality.

The Pacific Ocean has been host to what has been aptly called "The Blob" since 2013. The Blob is a warm water mass that has been hovering the coast and steadily expanding. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), the "warm expanse has been characterized by sea surface temperatures as much as three degrees C (about 5.4 degrees F) higher than average".¹

The consequences have been dire. As of August 2015, the mass covers 2,000 miles of coast from Baja, Mexico up to Alaska with a girth of up to 500 miles.

The impact has been measured primarily in exemplary species. Marine birds and starfish numbers have dropped drastically. Krill haven't been showing up, yet Humpback whales have made unusual coast-

al appearances. Sardines have dropped drastically, which has resulted directly in starving sea lions and brown pelicans.

The rapid melting of polar ice caps has sadly become an accepted occurrence, but they are not alone. Sea ice, a crucial part of arctic ecology, has waned and, in some places, vanished. This has resulted in massive walrus “haul outs,” gatherings on beaches, in lieu of using sea ice for rest between dives for food. An aerial survey in October of 2014 by the National Marine Mammal Laboratory found “no sea ice spotted on Saturday, but it showed 35,036 walruses on the beach near Point Lay.”² Polar bears use the sea ice to hunt walrus and sea lions. Despite having shown incredible resiliency through adaptations like epic nine day, 400 mile swims and a form of “walking hibernation” Polar bears remain endangered with little chance of improvement. With no sea ice they starve.³

And then there’s the salmon.

*An estimated quarter-million salmon, more than half of the spring spawning run up the Columbia River, perished, probably because of a disease that thrives in warm water and causes gill rot, officials said.*⁴

Half of the Sockeye Salmon runs in the Pacific Northwest are gone. Federal and State biologists point to the culprit: “the warm water is lethal for the cold-water species and is wiping out at least half of this year’s return of 500,000 fish.”⁵ Ultimately this number could pass 80% of the Sockeye population. The warm water is paired with decreased snowfall resulting in decreased snowpack. The rivers are simply not getting the cold water that they need sufficiently from any source.⁶

Salmon have remained an icon of the Pacific Northwest. And for good reason: they come in large numbers, can be smoked and stored, are an excellent food source and, more importantly, a fatty one. This is the future that civilization has heaped upon us. That the salmon will become an asterisk on the promises of Progress simply cannot happen. It must not happen.

“The Blob” is a part of the new normal: a part of the landscape of abrupt and worsening climate instability. It is not the anomaly. As NOAA states, “Not since records began has the region of the North Pacific Ocean been so warm for so long.”⁷

Nor is this mass alone. Massive algae blooms and warm water spells have been making headlines for years now, but always as though they were a scientific curiosity. As though it were an alien life form that simply was left behind and, if ignored sufficiently, it will resolve itself. As Pat Gilbert of the Horn Point Laboratory of Maryland states,

“There’s no question that we’re seeing more algal blooms more often, in more places, when they do occur, they’re lasting longer and often over greater geographical areas. We’re seeing more events than documented decades ago.”⁸



These kinds of algal blooms release compounds like Domoic acid, a neurotoxin that sickens most animals (including humans) and poisons shell fish. Domoic acid was found to be at least one cause for streaks of “mysterious” bird die offs in 2011.⁹

What stands out about these types of ordeals is the way that we report and respond to them. The link between changing climate and human based disruptions remains at a professional distance that is doing no one a favor. We become passive subjects, not the perpetrators of a toxin spewing, forest clearing, oil mining, and mountain-removing warpath. We are a part of this. And we will no doubt feel the consequences as all living beings will. But it is our level of comfort with distraction that allows us to keep flipping through headlines on our smartphones instead of feeling this pain. Feeling the pain of an ongoing ecocide. Feeling the pain of knowing that salmon runs, the sacred life sustaining source for numerous struggling indigenous societies, past, present and future, could be gone: not even in a lifetime, but within years.

The disgust should pervade our bodies. It should ignite rage within us. But, like the salmon, it has too many dams blocking its path. So even while one Associated Press article can state that:

*Basically, it’s not just a bunch of anomalies anymore. Scientists say these occurrences are part of a rapidly changing ecosystem.*¹⁰

We can pretend we are the aloof audience. Unaware. Uninvolved. Not present.

This response is increasingly typical. We can’t connect the dots. We won’t. Because the immediate future, the world that civilization has created, the one that we take part in perpetuating is really fucking

scary. Psychologically it's hard to grasp because it's larger and more contrived than our regionally rooted nomadic hunter-gatherer minds are capable of even comprehending.¹¹

This kind of schizophrenic attempt to tackle our changing reality was exemplified through an increase in shark attacks over the summer in the Carolinas. Rising water temperatures didn't evade the Atlantic Ocean, noted by a Washington Post article on the matter: "More long-term explanations include generally warmer water temperatures, which bring fish accustomed to warmer waters northward, bringing hungry sharks with them." Yet, the very same article makes this obtuse assertion: "Nobody seems sure why there have been more than the usual number of shark attacks in the Carolinas this summer."¹² If we can't be held responsible enough to maintain a single thought through an entire article, then it's possibly sensible enough to handle the "shark problem" as the locals on Carolina beaches did: hunt sharks aggressively.

If you can't ignore it, kill it.

I fear that Obama might be correct in a sense: we might be the last generation to do something about climate change. But unless that action aims to target and dismantle the grid, the fate of the salmon is sealed. And humans will follow.

Endnotes

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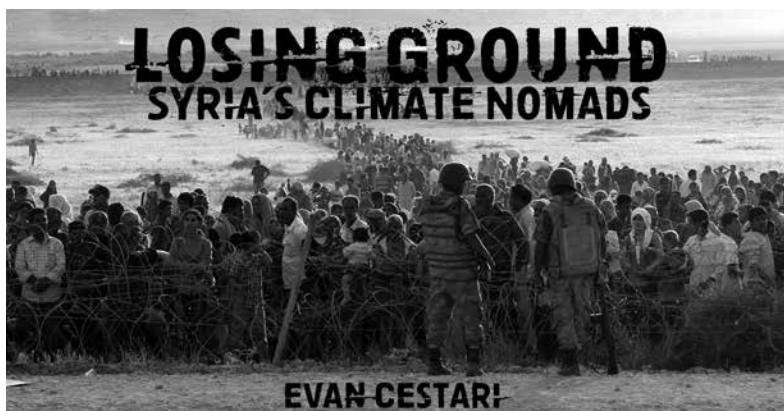
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The climate wars have already begun. In the parlance of the State, climate change has proven to be a “threat multiplier” that has become typified by, among other conflicts, a war in Syria that to date has killed more than 300,000 people and displaced over 9 million.¹ With people throughout the Middle East escaping the ongoing resource wars and desperate for some semblance of stability, Europe now faces its greatest refugee influx since World War II and fears over a reactionary fascist backlash loom in the background.

All this when we’ve only just scratched the surface of climate change. With a 0.85°C increase in global average temperature over since the Industrial Revolution, the United Nations estimates that 60 million people have been forced to flee their homes.² Meanwhile, as global average temperature is widely expected to climb past a catastrophic 2°C limit, analysts predict that number to more than double to 150 million in the next 35 years. Ten times that figure, or nearly 10 percent of the world’s population, are at direct risk of displacement due to climate change.³ What an increasingly probable 6°C or higher global temperature increase may bring becomes a frightening proposition.

The Syria-Climate Connection

The haunting image of a refugee Syrian toddler’s corpse washed up on a Turkish beach is now weaved into our nightmarish cultural subconscious. But sadly, such a tragedy had been long predicted in a part of the world where water was scarce, populations growing, and pressures to develop advanced agricultural economies reached new levels. At least since the 1970s, Syria, Iraq and Turkey were locked in tense standoffs, and even “undeclared wars” over access to the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates.⁴ By 1999, Turkey, a NATO member and European Union

candidate nation, succeeded in quelling Kurdish resistance and wasted little time in advancing a series of dams and irrigation projects that left Syrian farmers with a trickle of their former flows. Meanwhile, population growth surged in all three countries at a rate that would double the number of inhabitants in mere decades. As analyst Michael T. Klare stated in 2001, “The stage is being set for a series of recurring crises over water supplies in the Tigris-Euphrates basin.”⁵

Enter the threat multiplier, climate change. From 2006 to 2010, as moist Mediterranean winds weakened and surface temperatures spiked to new highs, an epic drought plagued the region. It was reputed to be the worst in Syria’s recorded history and at least two to three times more likely to occur due to climate change. In an area already short on water, 1.5 million starving villagers fled to overcrowded city centers. With a crippled domestic agricultural industry also came a catastrophic loss of imports as Russia, a main supplier of grain, halted all exports in 2010 after a “once in a century” heatwave triggered wildfires, destroyed crops and claimed the lives of over 50,000 Russian people. Food riots erupted throughout the Middle East, eventually cascading into the Arab Spring. The Bashar al-Assad regime reacted swiftly and violently to the desperate migrants while brutal ISIS gangs, dependent on an economy of pillaging and slavery, stepped in to fill the void. As the conflict escalated throughout both the cities and countryside, both sides didn’t hesitate to deploy chemical weapons, barrel bombs, and other indiscriminate weapons causing the casualty figure to surpass 250,000. Determined to escape what can only be called a living hell, 3 million Syrians sought refuge abroad, including 150,000 who trekked to parts of Europe by the Autumn of 2015. It is currently uncertain exactly how welcoming the European nations will be. Some states, such as Germany, have pledged to take in tens of thousands; others, such as Hungary, have actively resisted the influx.

Syrian economist Samir Aita notes the historical irony of the disaster’s location: “State and government was invented in this part of the world, in ancient Mesopotamia, precisely to manage irrigation and crop growing,” said Aita, “and Assad failed in that basic task.”⁶ However, considering the rising climate pressures, it is doubtful that any political leader, democratic or authoritarian, could have ever succeed. Despite attempts to obfuscate the crisis as the result of mismanagement, the truth is that it is more structurally rooted in a globalized industrial economy that is both perpetrator and victim of its own catastrophe.

Like every other symptom and driver of a collapsing civilization, what is new here is the global scale rather than the crises themselves. Mass migrations due to climate change have been repeatedly pointed out as a culprit in the sequence of events leading to the collapse of complex societies. In his sweeping history of the role of climate change as a “serial killer” of civilizations, Eugene Linden convincingly portrays the Mongolian barbarian intruders that overwhelmed the Roman Empire in the 6th century as exiles of a conflict catalyzed by sudden global cooling around 536 A.D.⁷ Ethnic Avar horsemen, who increasingly lost economic and political influence to their rival Turkic herders after a severe drought decimated their primary equine resources, moved west gathering other disaffected groups on the edges of the Empire. Few historians point to barbarian invasions as the sole cause for the collapse of the Roman Empire, yet combined with other factors including food shortages, disease, and population overshoot, Rome became progressively overburdened by a series of related and ruinous catastrophes.



Jared Diamond illustrates another example of such a process in his book *Collapse* while discussing the last stages of Greenland Norse society shortly after the start of the Little Ice Age between 1400 and 1800. While Greenland's Western settlements experienced the worst effects and became unable to grow hay for livestock, the Gardar settlement in the East was located in a more resilient area that could still support cows, the preferred source of protein among the settlers. Diamond suggests how the final breakdown unfolded:

[A]t the end, Gardar was like an overcrowded lifeboat. When hay production was failing and the livestock had all died or been eaten at the poorer farms of Eastern Settlement, their settlers would have tried to push their way onto the best farms that still had some animals: Brattahlid, Hvalsey, Herjolfsnes, and last of all Gardar. The authority of the church officials at Gardar Cathedral, or of the landowning chief there, would have been acknowledged as long as they and the power of God were visibly protecting their parishioners and followers. But famine and associated disease would have caused a breakdown of respect for authority, much as the Greek historian Thucydides described in his terrifying account of the plague of Athens 2,000 years earlier. Starving people would have poured into Gardar, and the outnumbered chiefs and church officials could no longer prevent them from slaughtering the last cattle and sheep.⁸

In both Linden's and Diamond's accounts, developed states over time became overpowered by hungry people. And in both cases, climate change fueled that hunger.

Migration and the Collapse Forecast

What remains clear, even to those in power, is that the Syrian situation is a mere drop in the bucket compared to the displacement that is in store. Tesla CEO Elon Musk publicly called Europe's refugee crisis a "small indication of what the world will be like" adding that the tens of millions of refugees today will increase exponentially. Indeed, all this was forecast by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its very first report on climate change in 1990 which foretold "millions of people displaced by shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and severe drought."⁹ As the effects of climate change continue to be felt more directly in the First World, we become more and more likely to see conflict. John Gray wrote in his 2003 book *Al Qaeda and What it Means to Be Modern* that "global warming may well overtake scarcity in energy supplies as a source of geopolitical conflict."¹⁰ Gray foresaw major disruptions in food production leading to mass migrations that would eventually be blocked by both autocratic and democratic regimes.

Echoing such a proscription, in 2008 journalist Mark Lynas painted a dismal prognosis in his book *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet*:

With structural famine gripping much of the subtropics, hundreds of millions of people will have only one choice left other than death for themselves and their families: They will have to pack up their belongings and leave. The resulting population transfers could dwarf those that have historically taken place owing to wars or crop failures.

...Conflicts will inevitably erupt as these numerous climate refugees spill into already densely populated areas....Tens of millions more will flee north from Africa towards Europe, where a warm welcome is unlikely to await them; new fascist parties may make sweeping electoral gains by promising to keep the starving African hordes out. Undaunted, many of these new climate refugees will make the journey on foot, carrying what they can, with children and old people trailing behind. Many of them will die by the wayside. Uprooted, stateless, and without hope, these will be the first generation of a new type of people; climate nomads, constantly moving in search of food, their varied cultures forgotten, ancestral ties to ancient lands cut forever. But these people may not be content to remain passive victims, for they will surely know that the world they inherit is not one that they have created. The resentment felt by Muslims towards Westerners will be tame by comparison. As social collapse accelerates, new political philosophies may emerge, philosophies that seek to lay blame where it truly belongs- on the rich countries that lit the fire that has now begun to consume the world.¹¹

Today, Lynas seems incorrect only in terms of exactly who would be the first to experience such climate change induced famine. Certainly, it is not difficult to find parallels between the ideology Lynas describes and the bloodthirsty quest for revenge espoused by ISIS.

Of course, the blame of the rich nations that Lynas describes only scratches the surface; anarcho-primitivism digs deeper to lay the finger on domestication and civilization itself. As Tim Garrett, professor of Atmospheric Studies at the University of Utah explains, civilization is fundamentally a “heat engine” programmed for climate change as it “consumes energy and does ‘work’ in the form of economic production, which then spurs it to consume more energy.”¹² The task facing anarcho-primitivists then becomes engaging the crisis and the “climate nomads” in ways that expose the underlying culprit while resisting emerging fascist and xenophobic tendencies. Simultaneously, we can lead attempts to reconnect with wild places that may be on the mar-

gins for agriculture, but which may allow a more flexible resource base through foraging. The solutions to foraging in dry environments will undoubtedly vary from area to area, but any attempts to do so can draw hope from contemporary foragers. As !Kung elder Moloreng states in James Workman's important book *Heart of Dryness: How the Last Bushmen Can Help Us Endure the Coming Age of Permanent Drought*; "The old...They know how to live without the water."¹³

Perhaps the most hopeful vision we can draw upon is that of the Greenland Inuit during the course of the Norse civilization's decline. While not immune to the effects of climatic variations in an already marginal environment, with large fluctuations in the populations of prey species meaning sporadic community starvations, Inuit culture as a whole was able to draw upon a wider variety of food resources to adapt through the Little Ice Age that starved out the Western Settlements and eventually even the rich Gardar. Amidst social collapse the Norse were unable to overcome their ingrained contempt for Inuit culture and could therefore not seek assistance from those who most knew how to persist. It is now our duty to not repeat their mistake.

Endnotes

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The Forest is Our Livelihood:

Sofia Yu on the Fate of the Penan

-Kevin Tucker



Palm plantations in the place of forests in Borneo. All photos by Sofia Yu.

In 1987, the Penan of Sarawak were faced with the saddening reality of our globalizing civilization in the form of large-scale mechanized logging. We know too well what this looks like: “Sago palms and fruit trees are felled, game disappears, river siltation occurs, rattan is destroyed, and graves are obliterated” writes anthropologist J. Peter Brosius. “Logging alters a landscape imbued with biographical, historical, and cultural significance, destroying those things that are iconic of the Penan’s existence as a society.”¹

The Penan did not take this lightly.

On February 13, 1987, the Penan issued the following statement:

“We, the Penan people of the Tutoh, Limbang, and Patah rivers region, declare: Stop destroying the forest or we will be forced to protect it. The forest is our livelihood. We have lived here before any of you outsiders came. We fished in clean rivers and hunted in the jungle.... Now the logging companies turn rivers into muddy streams and the jungle into devastation. ... By your doings you take away our livelihood and threaten our very lives. ... We want our ancestral land, the

land we live off, back. ... If you decide not to heed our request, we will protect our livelihood. We are a peace-loving people, but when our very lives are in danger, we will fight back."²²

And fight back they did.

Their resistance took the form of blockades across logging roads, armed with blowpipes. Joined by other indigenous societies of the region, the resistance halted logging operations at twenty-three sites throughout Sarawak before the timber companies and governments cracked down.

The Penan were faced with imprisonment and forced settlements. This against a back drop of diminishing forests, an increase in secondary forests, and a decrease in sago, one of their greatest sources for food. There has been no unified front in how to deal with this encroaching reality and for understandable reasons: the Penan were faced with destruction and mediation that were unknowable in their world. Yet many Penan have struggled to maintain their identity, their culture, and the forest they see themselves as a part of.

And things have gotten worse.

One of the immediate responses to Al Gore's ironically titled, *An Inconvenient Truth*, was to point out the direness of climate change while promoting palm as a renewable energy source. For the forests of Borneo and Malaysia, this put more kindling on an already swelling fire.

Malaysia was no stranger to palm production, but they lead the way in 2006 by adding a national mandate requiring all diesel fuel to contain 5% palm oil biodiesel. The percentage would increase to 10% by 2014.³ Here palm is a homegrown resource, but those numbers would become mirrored throughout the world. As Gore sold palm oil as a renewable energy, palm found its way into nearly every food imaginable. Malaysia cashed in, now producing 90 million tons of palm annually.⁴

Palm flooded the market and massive swaths of land were clear cut for plantations.

The most telling aspect of palm production has been how quickly and widely it has spread into our lives without acknowledgement. Stories of endangered Orangutans have been met quickly with green washing stories of sustainable plantations. Production must be assumed, so sustainability must be relative.

Our narrative remains the same: civilization must and will carry on. But for the Penan, there is no mystery. There is no distance here. Their lifeway, the lives that they have struggled and fought to maintain



are at direct odds with the mythos of a “sustainable” civilization. This is a lifeway that echoes its lineage and depth, which breathes its legacy. And it is being destroyed. Actively. Pervasively.

For fuel. For industrialized and processed foods.

Energy created to sustain a heaving electrically driven corpse to the ends of the earth.

And yet the Penan absorb a degree of our ambiguity. We crave the better world that we have been sold, but we are lost in our own seething disappointment with how things are. Having been met with the threats and promises of industry, the path of enlightenment through integration sought by missionaries and humanitarians, and the impossibility and illegality of their own way of life: the Penan echo degrees of our own defeat. For a world where the present is a remembrance of past and the future a continuity of memory, the demolition of place leads to a confrontation with expectations of what is to come.

For a people who live in the present, the idea of a future separated from place and from their being, is a frightening unknown.



What Sofia has captured is the beauty of those societies struggles to persevere. They carry within them the spirit of the forest, the resilience of the wild. Even as children walk amongst the remains of the forests their parents walked in: they carry the prospect of the human-animal, that ember of hope that struggles against all odds to be stoked again. They reflect the uphill battle we all face, but in a world lit by the dim hum of screens reflecting off of faces searching for any semblance of

community, they are the reflection that we sorely need to see. And of the reality that we must be forced to face.

I have the good fortune of being friends with Sofia Yu, a photographer and green anarchist who has never turned down an invitation or opportunity to try and capture what is being lost, but most importantly, what has been fought for and what must be fought for. This struggle is not over.

In 2011, Sofia had the privilege of being invited by the Penan to capture the beauty of their lives and the destruction wrought by the palm plantations. What follows is a brief interview with Sofia about that experience and her photographs from that trip.



Who are the Penan?

The Penan are the last hunter-gatherers of South East Asia (more precisely, Malaysian Borneo) that up until recently have lived a nomadic lifestyle. They also live in a non-hierarchical society.

They are very relaxed people with a great sense of humor. They were always warm and had great intentions towards me. Women were free to choose the men that they liked, often heckling the lazier ones, but always in a light-hearted way. They have no sense of age and they don't seem to care what they look like.

They were always nomads, so they were allowed into anyone else's land, but that has changed.

The Forest is Our Livelihood

How have they described their relationship to the land?

For the Penan who still live in the forest, the land is most important thing in their lives and an extension of themselves.



How have they fared in secondary forests?

Surviving in a very unhealthy way.

The clear cuts alone create a horrible situation: the run off destroys the waterways. The dense mud kills the wildlife. There is no fresh water for bathing or drinking. Wild food becomes scarcer.

The secondary forest is inseparable from the society that creates it: here you have the loggers, missionaries and governments. Most of the loggers come from Indonesia and work for Chinese companies. They are thugs. There are many stories of rape and them selling drugs to the Penan. The girls who are raped can't report that anywhere because some don't even have a name or ID, nor would they risk going through the roads that the loggers also have access to.

That pressure spreads across all the local indigenous societies and creates or amplifies tensions. Other societies exploit the Penan, like the Kelabit, which is another tribe that has been settled in the area for a long time and have disputed land over the years. That has resulted in an increase in headhunting. Fighting between the tribes has increased overall.

Some of the Penan I lived with work for the Kelabit in the rice fields, they get very little money from this: 3 dollars a day for men and 1 dollar per day for women. It's a horrible situation, but the Penan have no sense of the value of money.

How has this impacted their traditional diets and overall living?

Their nutrition is very poor due to the lack of game and fruit trees in number and diversity, so they started to turn towards agriculture: learning how to plant. From living closely to the "outside world" they also gain easy access to processed food. I don't think they have the grounds to really understand the underlying problems about that, even though you could see it.

Another thing that they have been suffering from due to close contact with the "outside world" are the contagious diseases, like tuberculosis. That is the major one. The government doesn't allow the Penan to speak their language or to use Penan-names (based off of plants and animals), so if they are to go to the clinics then they have to oblige. They also must wear clothing, but hygiene is an issue. The clothing is very foreign to them and they will do things like not take their pants off to pee. Their health has suffered: they have bad nails and no teeth.

The government now gives them land so long as they surrender to everything they say. Some will and some won't. The Penan that still live in the forest are the last to struggle against that situation. Muslim and Christian missionaries tend to convert them by going to their camps

The Forest is Our Livelihood

and giving them clothes and more. A lot have become Christians.

What has palm production meant for the Penan?

It has meant a tremendous sadness, specifically the frustration of not being able to defend the land from the plantations and logging activity.

What does palm represent to them?

The palm oil production represents the epitome of everything that has been destroying the Penan, directly and indirectly, their lifestyle, culture and so on.



What lies ahead for the Penan and how do they see the future?

The majority don't think about their future, which is both tricky and ironic.

They all know about the causes of why they are moving away from the forests but in general they seem happy with the idea of settling down and having the ability to gain access to education, for instance, if that means a better future. These are sort of ideas that some follow without questioning. It seems like a good solution when you have no other options living in their conditions.

This is all from my experience living with numerous and various Penan in the forests; it does not represent all their views. But all in all, the Penan are definitely facing extinction: they aren't able to be nomads anymore, just semi nomads.

You can expect to see and hear more from Sofia here, but in the meantime you can see more of her work at sofia-yu.com.



Endnotes

1 J Peter Brosius, "The Western Penan of Borneo" in Lee and Daly, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pg 315.

2 Quoted in Michael Klare, *Resource Wars*-. New York: Metropolitan, 2001. Pg 205.

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palm_oil_production_in_Malaysia accessed on August 26, 2015.

4 *ibid*



Continuing our discussion from *Black and Green Review* No 1 with our anonymous anarcho-primitivist anthropologist friend and cohort. This time we're getting to tackle some of the topics that other anarchists and radicals have thrown out to attempt to discredit anarcho-primitivism and take a closer look at what anthropology is.

Our anthropologist currently resides and works in Alaska amongst remaining hunter-gatherer populations and those who have taken strides to exit civilization on their own. Due to the heavily politicized nature of the field and job, he unfortunately must remain anonymous. But these perspectives need to be heard.

Our interview will conclude with the final part in *Black and Green Review* no 3.

- Kevin Tucker

What do you have to say to anarchists who believe that anthropology is simply a vestige of civilized visions and is therefore entirely unreliable or worthy of consideration?

I recently read something where a critic was trying to accuse anarcho-primitivists of being double-dealers for citing anthropological research to back up their views while simultaneously expressing a total rejection of science. I'm not sure what anarcho-primitivists the critic was talking about. I certainly don't completely reject science.

I mean, what is the scientific method? It is a means of obtaining knowledge by testing a hypothesis. How could anyone who is legitimately concerned about the plight of humanity and the earth reject curiosity, investigation, the search for answers and knowledge? In this sense, the scientific method; experimentation and its results, represent the heartbeat of a few million years of human survival.

We know, from three million year old stone tools for example, that humans have been practicing the raw scientific method for far, far longer than industrial commerce driven science has existed. Experimentation has provided our species with possibilities, but it has also always informed us of our limitations.

Rejecting experimentation all-out means delving into the post-modern know-nothingness that is unfortunately very common, and even trendy, in leftist circles. Those people posture up, but it's just philosophy based on the internal wonderings of the individual, usually extremely domesticated and alienated individuals, people lacking tangible relationships with the physical world. So what ground do they really have to stand on?

I suppose if that group was forced to procure their own food rather than get it from the market or the dumpster they might actually need to practice the scientific method themselves or read some scientifically derived knowledge, if they wish to eat. The attack on science is often just an escape route for people who are afraid to do anything viable themselves.

That said, science is by no means perfect or uncorrupt. There is absolutely no doubt that anthropology, as a school of science, has a dark colonial history and even today that project continues. Academia itself is an industry run by a bunch of folks who absolutely depend upon the further projection of industrial civilization for their own survival.

Professional anthropology is severely limited both by the ubiquitous liberal sensitivities of anthropologists and the need to constantly obtain research funding. It's mind blowing to me, this situation where people with advanced anthropology degrees pretty much overwhelmingly and purposely overlook the primary knowledge that cultural anthropology has provided us over the last few centuries, namely that civilization and the social institutions that come with it are pathological, in exchange for their own professional and financial security.

My view is that the anthropological record as a whole clearly provides all the pieces to the puzzle and the current package of knowledge to be drawn from anthropological research makes very clear which direction we need to take things if we are to seriously alter the drastic situation we currently find ourselves in as a species. Yet today's professional anthropologists tend to ignore all this and just push on with their total involvement in the system. Once you get that plush professorship then you buy a house, have kids, settle-in and so much for using your own science to confront civilization in any critical way, being that civilization is your lifeline.

I'm glad you bring this up because "science" is something I wrestle with often. I feel it is central to propelling civilization and our disconnection, but, like most things, it comes from something that is deeply wild in a sense. Louis Liebenberg considered tracking to be the origin of science. John Young has tried to distinguish science and indigenous methods of knowing in ways that I respect. John Gray points out that science is more useful in disproving theories than in proving them, better at uncovering untruths than discovering truths.

I can see validity in all of those points and yours. Is science the fractured basis upon which we see a dissected and isolated world or a just a reflection of it? That's not an easy one and its only further complicated by social sciences. Is science one of the "master's tools" or are we just stuck with the master's narratives and biases? Maybe both.

I think it's pretty much both and that at this point there is no real way around it. I can guarantee that even the most militant primitivist out there got there to some degree as a result of being influenced by western scientific knowledge. So science is just inherently part of our mind-set from the minute we start rejecting the dominant culture we were born into, being that so much of the knowledge we have which tells us this whole thing is wrong is ultimately sourced from ecological science, climate science, social science etc.

At this stage I can't really see any point in positing a dogmatic, hardline rejection of 'science'. I think I would characterize that type of stance as postmodernist posturing above all else. We can certainly be critical of individual scientific institutions, individual scientists, research methods, projects and the entire apparatus. But we also should not overlook the important and legitimate things that we have learned and continue to learn from western science.

I'm not saying that I want to perpetuate the institution of western science or that it is some type of grand solution to our crisis. Certainly not. When it comes down to choosing sides I choose primal ways of knowing above all else and in the long-run, western science as an institution isn't worth saving, but there remains a lot of passionate and earth caring knowledge that we can sift from its databases and make useful to us in terms of strengthening our awareness of the world and helping us make the best choices for action.

Overall, we certainly need to fully acknowledge and incorporate the things about *Knowing* that folks like Young and Liebenberg offer to us. The work of those folks has no doubt been influenced by run-of-

the-mill anthropological science to a degree, but they have taken what can be known and experienced to higher levels. A handful of anthropologists have also fully acknowledged that indigenous ways of knowing are ultra-connected to ecological reality and are in many capacities highly superior to western, civilized ways of knowing, so none of this has been lost on anthropology. One important difference is that the academics don't really act on this knowledge; they just write boring journal articles about it that hardly anyone reads and take a paycheck from the university. Someone like John Young actually applies this knowledge to cultivating a connected and authentic relationship with the wild world and has dedicated his life to inspiring and motivating other people to do the same. So the application of knowledge makes a critical difference in its ultimate value.

This is a difficult subject really, but to sum it up, I would say that, for me, experiential knowledge gained from being in wildness always out weighs knowledge from books and "science". Science, in a way, is really second hand knowledge. It has value, but that value must be measured against real time experience in real life.



That makes a lot of sense, but I have also noticed that anthropologists are often capable of saying radical things based on their research without coming off as radical.

Oh yeah, that continues to go on for sure but I wonder if some of them are even aware that they are absolutely attacking civilization with their work! That's part of the problem, because if you were to confront them about the true implications of their research results most of them would avoid the conversation. Trust me, I've tried it a lot and mostly get shut down. And this is partly what I mean about liberal sensitivities.

There is a lot of research out there which points to contemporary indigenous cultures entirely falling into the pitfalls of civilization via their own agency. Like here in Alaska there are some tribal entities that are not necessarily being coerced by governments or industries to assist with developing off shore oil in the Beaufort Sea. The tribal leaders are all for it, they want the money, and not one liberal academic will protest whatsoever. It's the whole 'ethic' of indigenous self-determination. Let them decide for themselves and god forbid an anthropologist present to the tribal people any information about the dark side of the deal they are signing up for, as that would be seen as paternalistic. There is definitely this tyranny of political correctness that exists in mainstream anthropology and it is really limiting.

But I totally agree with you. In the mainstream media, at least, scientists ARE the people making the radical statements and regardless of all the problems, in our current situation science remains a primary medium which informs us with data ultimately sourced from the real physical world of humans, animals, and ecosystems. A rejection of the institution itself, the colonial/industrial institution of the academy and all of its baggage, does not require complete rejection of the diversity and rich knowledge base produced from it.

As equally alienated, domesticated, and industrialized beings, many of the scholars whose research has provided primitivists and anti-civ folks with very important understandings have found themselves caught up in the game of civilization, but this does not invalidate their findings. To say otherwise, at least for me, amounts to a copout – an indolent failure to cope with the complexity the scientific and anthropological record presents to us.

And what does the record tell us? Taken in broadly, the whole array of what science today tells us, whether it is climate, ecology, biodiversity, soil, water, nutrition, health, psychology, and yes, biological, cultural, and archaeological anthropology, clearly informs us of the causes and consequences of the civilizational trajectory. And if one pays attention, every month new academic research results emerge which basically validate the anti-civilization perspective. So knowledge coming out of science provides an essential foundation for most of us, albeit I think it can also be argued that some have reached similar understandings intuitionally or through direct experience rather than through extensive academic literature review.

Still, a thorough review of the literature side of anthropological record absolutely informs and validates the general anarcho-primitivist standpoint. It's complicated for sure but all the pieces to the puzzle are

there. And again lots of those puzzle pieces include anthropological realities that most professional scholars don't want to acknowledge. Like I work with three different anthropologists who are vegetarians and they avoid the topic of primal nutrition like the plague. And the core information in the ethnographic record which shatters many of the romantic notions assigned to indigenous people overtime, like the simplified stereotype that all indigenous people lived sustainably and took care of the land, lots of the super politically correct types don't want get into conversations which might shatter that myth. So there is no doubt that the subjectivity of the researcher can be a problem in anthropology.

Depending on who is doing the research, certain important aspects of what is going on in a culture might not even be noticed or reported on. There is no way around it that all anthropological research is biased to the subjectivity of the researcher and in doing ethnography, I'll be honest, a lot of what ends up in journal articles and the like depends on the political worldview of the authors. It's not that people fail to report certain things because they don't want the world to know about it, it's more that so many anthropologists are caught up in that very liberal, social-justice oriented, pro-technology, pro-'sustainable' development mentality that they just utterly fail to ask the important questions. Also, anthropological research can be qualitative, quantitative, or both and the quantitative stuff, the numbers, can be very revealing and less subject to bias.

You and I both share a Cultural Materialist perspective. I think that's something that is vital to point out. Arising from Cultural Ecology, it effectively is a perspective that centers on the axiom that subsistence determines substance: how you procure your needs from the land largely determines the social and ecological aspects of any given society. Neighbors can influence that as much as ecology. But when you see the world this way and recognize that the available options for procurement have all been tried, it says a lot about how we got here and where we can go.

Can you speak to this and its implications?

There's that for sure. A materialist lens is basically foundational and essential for grasping the mechanisms that drive culture and cultural change.

You always hear from liberals that we should be working on trying to create some type of 'conscious' shift towards ecological enlightenment for the masses. I mean that's the extent of their approach real-

ly, activism to 'raise awareness' and on and on. But there is relatively very little thinking given towards actually shifting our material condition. Rather there is this idea that we can just go on with progress and technology and most people having all their basic needs met through this completely alienating industrial machine and somehow people will just live more 'consciously'. But the anthropological record, when viewed through a materialist lens, informs us that things never really work this way and that most change comes about, first, as a result of changing material conditions.



The way I like to put it is that *life defines consciousness, consciousness does not define life*. 'Life' meaning that to live we first need to have our basic needs met; food, clothes, shelter, water, heat, and that the means by which those basic needs are met is entirely foundational to our cultural consciousness. So, in the context of modern society, I have come to see that some of the most important implications of subsistence determining substance are the psychological effects related to people having their material needs met in this immensely separating and alienating manner imposed by the industrial system, and now with most persons emotional needs being met through the digital world the material crisis has reached a monstrous new level of low.

Yet in hunting and gathering cultures every need is met in direct relationship with local ecology and in direct relationship with human community. No other method of subsistence provides this level of connectivity and awareness and the implications of this in terms of effectively confronting our ecological crisis, our psychological crisis, and looking forward to the future cultures we want try and create to get ourselves out of that crisis are just massive.

Just think how consciousness regarding self, society, and the nat-

ural world might have shifted with the beginnings of specialization, division of labor, commodification, and agriculture. Again, the implications are just massive in terms of our cultural and psychological evolution as a species. We could talk a whole lot on the topic of cultural materialism for sure! For now, I'll just summarize by saying that I believe it is an absolutely foundational perspective and approach and I am very happy to know that you seem to feel similarly.

I think that it's a crucial perspective.

What do you think that perspective and anthropology in general has done for the anarcho-primitivist critique?

Overall, both historically and contemporarily, anthropology as western science has definitely been a mixed bag in terms of its positives and negatives. For the purposes of anti-civ, anarcho-primitivist oriented analysis the methods associated with the cultural materialism and human ecology theories are of primary relevance, because the information gleaned from fieldwork where these theories are applied allows us to see how the differing ways people use resources initiate different social institutions and how specific ecological relationships shape the trajectory of a culture.

During the 1960s and 70s these theories were abundantly applied to hunter-gatherer research and this produced a lot of the data that anarcho-primitivists cite. The researchers who pursued this avenue have been subject to heavy critique by some anthropologists who accuse them of risky left leaning bias and a general approach to their research influenced by the counter cultural atmosphere of that era. But I have taken it upon myself to thoroughly vet these accounts and my standpoint is that the human ecology/ cultural materialism people were generally asking the right questions, doing their research in full view of where industrial civilization was heading, and seeing the great contrast in well-being between the cultures they were studying and their own civilized cultures. Their accusers, on the other hand, seem to be well-biased in the other direction as comfortable apologists for civilization.

As for me, I try to carry on those highly relevant human ecology, cultural materialist traditions by practicing my own brand of new-school radical anthropology. I practice experimental anthropology and archaeology, in an attempt to employ tangible learning with real psychical materials and earth relations. I also heavily incorporate resilience and adaptation theory in my work and analysis, which is quite

detailed, but involves analysis of what social factors tend to be the most ecologically adaptive and thereby lending to the most resilient living pathways over time.

I think I'll leave it at that for now. We could spend hours talking about anthropology

I think that the critique of anthropology, in so far as you can call it that, is based off this reification of anthropology. The same can be said of science to a degree, but this is a massive field, so flattening it all down to a single category just seems ridiculous. I think there's a missing component there of just unfamiliarity with ethnographic work. As you've pointed out, a lot of it is really quantitative. Obviously that's an alien view of the world, but coming from within the vortex of it all, that data does mean a lot and can outlast an ethnographer's own perception. Until we take these steps on our own, I think it's an important tool to understand social change and consequence.

Absolutely.

Your work has taken you across the world. What are some of the things you've seen that just really stand out to you, both in terms of the resilience of the wild and the impacts of civilization?

Wherever I'm at, I am constantly performing ethnographic analysis regarding what is going on around me, in terms of human behavior and local ecological conditions, topography, climate etc. Walking around with anthropologist eyes is just a core part of my own personal perception and after immersing myself for years in a study of human ecology I can't really shake off this analytical state of mind. And, as I was saying before, any honest broad-based look at the anthropological record informs us that what we call civilization, all the social institutions associated with it such as specialization, domestication, production of surplus, elitist monopolization of surplus wealth and on and on, has been generally pathological in its effects on the human condition and on ecological systems globally.

I've been to six continents and the overarching theme of my experience is basically a constant verification of all of this. I should say that an equally enormous, but contrasting, overarching theme is a continuous recognition of how beautiful and massive this planet is. The ecology and geography of earth is just immensely powerful and reaches so far beyond any human psychological construct. There are

so many amazing eco-regions, habitats, and species. Wherever you go on earth you will see how all this has been decimated by industrial civilization but if you pay attention you will also see how immensely powerful and overarching wildness is. Wherever I have been I always have taken time to disappear into whatever patch of wildness I could find and when I do that I have never failed to discover elements which solidify for me what side I'm on in all of this. I mean you can really observe this sort of persistent war going on around the planet between the pressures of civilized psychosis and what is wild and free.



Also there is the human element, the cultural element, which basically no western traveler wants to be critical of. You tend to always come across hyper-civilized western tourists stumbling around romanticizing third world peoples, cultures, ancient monuments and all that. It's just one giant spectacle for them. They go back to their fancy hotels and complain about litter or beggars but have no idea, or desire to understand, how all the dots connect. Leftists just assume everything is just an issue of imperial colonization etc. But it is completely obvious that domesticated, civilized assumptions about virtually everything are the real problems at hand, in terms of both socioeconomic and ecological conditions in the third world.

Everywhere I've been in the third world I witness these cultures that are right on this cusp between a very ancient state of self-sufficiency, in terms of food, clothes, shelter, and a simultaneous loss of all that as a result of allowing themselves to become totally enslaved by a desire to have some crumbs from the industrial pie.

I guess it's just human, to be in the moment, to just want things a little easier and to have new products or whatever but this whole

mentality destroys the relative self-sufficiency of entire cultures and in-turn destroys ecosystems, because people end up being focused on producing goods that they can turn into cash. People are focused on HAVING, as opposed to just simply BEING.

Yet, one of the most beautiful things to witness inside of all this pandemonium to ‘develop’ is the people who have seem to not have bought into the industrial scheme, who ARE happy just BEING; their ability to struggle and endure with only what they obtain from the land, their connections with one another and their communal reliance, their traditional subsistence knowledge. These are their assets.

I was recently in Southeast Asia and all of these contrasting observations were extreme for me there. We were visiting some hill tribe communities and the level of land-based self-sufficiency and communal reliance stood out huge for me. I work primarily in Native American communities and I would say that in the case of surviving industrial collapse they don’t stand much of a chance against some of the Southeast Asian hill tribes, in terms of retained traditional skills and psychical fitness, the psychology of self-reliance etc.

But, ecologically things are much better off in the Americas than they are in Asia in terms of deforestation, pollution, water, and wildlife. It’s just crazy how decimated things are there. And the hill tribes I am speaking of are total minorities in the massive slough of domesticated humanity that is Asia; billions of humans riding around on motor-bikes in an all-encompassing industrial cesspool each trying to turn anything they can into a dollar. People willing to sell away everything viable they might have in exchange for a smartphone. Stuff like that. Despite the cool things I witnessed with some of the hill tribe people the overarching theme I came away with was one of total despair for the future of the earth, being that the majority of the human population resides in Asia.

And these observations apply to all my experiences on six continents. If had to describe what I have learned succinctly it would be; the wild earth is divine and all life is beautiful, but because of domestication and industrialization we are all completely fucked. How’s that for an ‘anthropological’ analysis?

* * * * *

Our interview will conclude in Black and Green Review no 3.

REVIEWS



Overgrown courtyard. Photo by Yank.



“To Our Friends,” The Invisible Committee

Reviewed by John Zerzan

For some time I have viewed with distaste the steady dribble of post-situationist drivel from France. The ambiguity/ambivalence/indecipherability of the Gallic flatulence (e.g. Tiqqun and the Invisible Committee, not the worst of the lot) has struck me as distracting rhetoric, made opaque to mask its inner leftism, it would seem. I’ve trashed it and enjoyed the depiction of a coin-operated machine, from a like-minded critic. One inserts however many centimes and receives so many

meters of well-phrased gibberish.

But if “it is always darkest just before the dawn,” I see quite a bit of dawn in this latest installment of “To Our Friends.” Of its two chapters, the first sheds less light, but leads to what dazzles in the second chapter. “Chapter 5: let’s disappear” opens the new contribution and mainly provides an insurrectionary survey of struggles, including both intense eruptions and long-term efforts (e.g. anti-TAV in the Suso Valley of northwest Italy). Pacifists come under fire, nihilists are nothing but “powerless individuals,” and social war is “just an unsuccessful updating of class war. There is a refreshing clarity or transparency to the prose, even if definite traces of leftism remain. Marx is cited: when asked about his idea of happiness, he answered, “To fight.” This ignores the fact that Marx never fought. His entire political life was one of constant compromise, including his initial condemnation of the Paris Commune.

“The developed postmodern societies have become extremely complex and hence very fragile” is a line near the end of the first chapter, setting the stage for the second, “Chapter ?: Fuck Off Google.”

The Invisible Committee looks at the vulnerability of hyper-complex society and sees that technology has not only woven its web over the planet but has altered “the very texture of the world in which we live.” It is “producing its own humanity,” it now constitutes a new

reality. Domination has entered a qualitatively new stage.

In this “accelerating datafication” of social existence, we collaborate with new levels of control via our own participation. Internet connectivity provides almost unlimited information about all of us, and thus behavior at a basic level can be mapped and predicted. “The great refrigerated storehouses of data are the pantry of current government.” Our French friends find in all this “a completely new logic” of rule.

They note that the “nightmare of this epoch” is precisely “its being the age of technology.” Their critique is profound in grasping the political nature of our age: “there’s no progress but capitalist progress.” That is, technological society is capitalist by its nature because technology is in no way neutral. The movement of technology is the movement of domination.

All of this, to the Invisible Committee, is “still a blind spot for revolutionaries.” This is a breakthrough document, away from the reams of rhetoric to desperately needed analysis. A fundamental wake-up call. Bravo!

“To Our Friends” was published in French in October 2014; an English translation of the two chapters was published in June 2015. Available at: <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/the-invisible-committe-to-our-friends>

The English book *To Our Friends* was published in April 2015 by semiotext(e).

UNAVOIDABLE DAMAGE

Nicholas Carr, *The Glass Cage: Automation and Us*. W.W. Norton & Co., 2014.

Matt Richtel, *A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention*. William Morrow, 2014.

Reviewed by Steve Kirk

I’ll admit at the start that I was a huge fan of *The Shallows*, Nicholas Carr’s last book exploring the effect the internet has on our brains. The book went beyond philosophical musings on the effects of technology to show the real physical consequences of our new data drowning paradigm. I was less familiar with Richtel, but I took the chance, based primarily on the praise from Carr on the dust jacket. I was not disappointed. Richtel is a top notch story teller with solid analysis. The

consequences of technology are painted through character depictions in his comprehensive telling of a teenager texting and driving. The protagonist of the story, Reggie, kills two men in Utah after swerving multiple times in the midst of a text conversation. Perhaps the scariest part is that the story takes place in 2006. We can only assume that the trajectory of distraction has grown exponentially.



I had high hopes for Carr's latest offering. A comprehensive look at the state and consequences of automation seemed a logical next topic for Carr. Indeed the book largely does for automation what *The Shallows* did for the internet, it digs into the actual human issues beneath the constant marketing of technology. Carr astutely points out that increasingly it is not the benefit to humans being sold, but the perfection of technology. The very idea that speed, accuracy, and the overall quantifiable omnipotence of the machine benefits society. Meanwhile actual humans get less adept and, if we are being truthful, stupider. Of

course, it would be great if Carr drew out his argument to the whole of technological progress in civilization, but, predictably, that does not happen. However, shortcomings should not define our experience of good analysis and Carr's is top. Anyone interacting with the automated and information laden world should read both his recent books.

A Deadly Wandering and *The Glass Cage* belong together for a number of reasons but largely because they are contemporaneous analysis and depictions of technology that are more critical than embracing. They both also share similar strengths and weaknesses. While Richtel provides a detailed story wrapped around the science of attention and multi-tasking in the wake of social technology, he finds himself in the same place as Carr, developing intense critiques that don't go anywhere. Conclusions are lost on Carr and Richtel, though their critiques run deep into the logic of civilization and progress. Carr doesn't back down from this as he quickly draws parallels to other societal technologies like the printing press and monumental changes

in human thinking and perception. Perhaps it is only the unavoidable pyrrhic nature of our technological growth that has led to these books. Both authors seem struck by the monumental and rapid change currently taking place. They try to reconcile their critique with an idea of progress that they just can't shake.

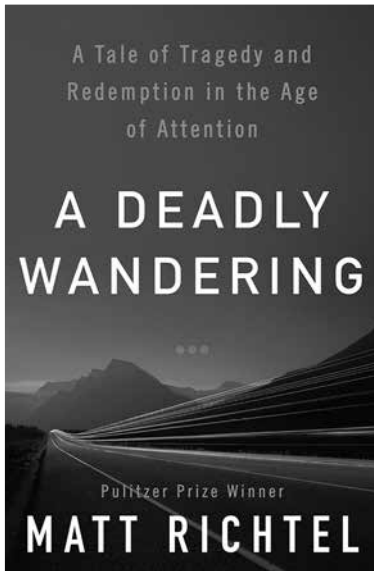
The biggest flaw in *The Glass Cage* is ensconced in its strength. Carr has taken a pro-technology stance with an anti-technology argument. It is a shame that Carr doesn't follow his own conclusions or insights to their logical conclusions. Technology has always removed us from the world. By viewing all tools as technology, Carr can view all technology as a more or less given to human existence. Carr largely ignores the material and infrastructural complexity inherent to new technologies and technological societies, which allows him to ground his scathing critique of technology in a pro-technology stance. Carr often sounds like a Luddite, and he seems to be comfortable with that term, but he is far from embracing a more total critique of technological systems. He sees opportunities in technology, and at times he even hints at a sci-fi like perfection of an animal human via technological assistance, instead of automation. However, he does not commit much time to his positive view. Its presence in the book seems off to me, as it did in *The Shallows*, it is as if Carr is trying incredibly hard just to stay on the "right" side of the technology debate. It has to get better right? Carr believes in progress and also believes we can shape it.

Carr's critique of the current paradigm is excellent. Carr takes us through deskilling of modern occupations. His analysis echoes our constant domestication and draws the informed reader back to a consistent pattern in civilization to undermine our basic ability to live free of the machine. It is horrific to think that the current deskilling is of occupations already so far removed from the immediacy of wildness. Pilots, nurses, doctors, drivers. Carr takes us into how this happens in our brains, how we learn, function, experience knowledge, experience experience itself. Carr comes down hard on technocrats and our current mass narrative surrounding technology. Carr writes of our current open arms view of all technology, that everyone who uses old technology/tools (Carr uses the term incorrectly as analogous to the same technological system) is hiding in nostalgia:

...the real sentimental fallacy is the assumption that the new thing is always better suited to our purposes and intentions than the old thing. That's the view of a child, naive and pliable...What matter's is how it enlarges us or diminishes us, how it shapes our

experience of nature and culture.

Clearly Carr is expressing a technological agnosticism that isn't hugely helpful but the point is still valid and it cuts to the heart of why the project of politicizing or problematizing technology is a failure. What Carr fails to mention is that if we changed our view, if we honestly looked at all the consequences, we would be forced to reconcile that no technological system creates more connection with wildness or a real community based culture.



Richtel echoes the agnosticism but draws a critique that, in the end, cuts even deeper than Carr's: technology manipulates and exploits existing human needs. It isn't a mystery why we can't stay away from technology, it mimics what we crave and it delivers an endless stream of connections, even if they are just ephemeral and ultimately unreal. He documents how we wait for the next good message or notification, we simply can't help but check, "what if its good?". Mystery isn't tenable if the ability to annihilate it exists within our reach. Welcome to the rabbit hole. Carr shows how

this works in the brain, how it grabs us, takes us over physically but Richtel cuts to the origins of why the technology is so successful, engineered by us for us in an intimate way. Richtel harps on the nature of attention and multitasking, and there is much to learn, but he saves his harshest critique of the most modern iterations of distraction for a lengthy epilogue where he crashes down on the programmers and marketers for providing more and more distraction, marketing our mental and physical demise. We are told we can multitask, in essence, to become more and more machine like, running out lives task to task like raising kids is an application running in the background of your metaphorical computer in your skull. Connection is lost. Richtel draws out the implications of the massive amount of sharing currently taking place (six billion text messages alone, each day in the US in 2014). He sees what many have missed, it is the craving for real connection that

propels our constant unyielding connectivity:

In modern life...the noise is not incidental, not a laboratory exercise. It is everywhere, and it is created by someone, or many, each with their needs. Pg.69

Richtel's second most important point involves his inclusion of Metcalfe's law. Basically, the more we individually and collectively interact with the machine, the more powerful it becomes. An obvious point but his pairing of Moore's (the generally accepted law of accelerating returns in technology, actually only a law for a particular technology, transistors, but used generally to discuss the falling price and advancement of technology) and Metcalfe's law presents us with a more than troubling portrait of an ever accelerating depreciation of life in general. He writes of the convergence of the two laws:

In Union, they were combining to provide unprecedented service to humans. But they were also putting a new kind of pressure on the brain: Moore bringing increased information, ever faster, and Metcalfe making the information so personal as to make the gadgets extraordinarily seductive, even addictive. Pg. 144

In the face of addiction it can be helpful to look at what makes us happy. Carr shows early on that we are happiest in flow. Working through a task. He again conflates terms and uses work and flow interchangeably. He isn't actually talking about work, he is talking about humans in application of a skill. He notes that we report to be happiest while at work yet almost universally claim to never want to go back. This is what empty application of skill looks like. There is no fulfillment or connection in industrial technology. We may feel best when doing something, applying knowledge and learning more deeply through our cognitive embodiment, but the day ends and we are at a loss with how to reconcile our meaningless activity with happiness. Even if it is the only part of the day we aren't immersed in some sort of leisure that involves, as we have been taught, the relaxation of all skills. A full day of meaninglessness attached to an evening of trying to forget where your energy went. All the while we are presented with unending distraction. We never really engage and the nature of "flow" seems untenable with our current techno-social paradigm. We seem happy when we pay attention and participate in the world, even at work no

less! Yet we are even losing that.

Reading these together is a worthwhile journey. The science, the reality, all of it is right in front of our faces. It needs articulation and these books are just the start. The pace of change hastens, Carr and Richtel couldn't possibly keep up, but they allow us to look back to recent memory and see what we've lost. Their portraits of recent modernity will haunt you.

**ENTERING AN ERA OF CONSEQUENCES:
Americans as the World's New Climate Refugees**



Giles Slade, *American Exodus: Climate Change and the Coming Flight for Survival*. New Society Publishers, 2013.

Reviewed by Four-Legged-Human

A friend recently forwarded me an agonizing email containing a link to a report that during July 2015 more than a quarter million of the annual Columbia River run of red salmon were either dead or dying as a result of extreme warm water temperatures in the river system which flows through Oregon, Washington, and Idaho¹. A week before, near the Idaho/Oregon

border, I had taken a relieving swim in the Snake River, a major tributary of the Columbia. It was 114f that afternoon. I was on my way north, looking forward to reaching middle British Columbia where I anticipated encountering more moderate temps. It would be another thousand miles and two days of inhaling wildfire smoke until I found refuge.

This was a micro-experience of precisely what Canadian author Giles Slade predicts as the future for many Americans in his book *American Exodus: Climate Change and the Coming Flight for Survival*². “Like it or not, we are entering an era of consequences”, says Slade, whose analysis points to a future for the American experience which mimics that of the refugees of past living arrangements which have

collapsed due to drought, usually connected to expansive agricultural systems reliant on massive water use and complex water harvesting infrastructure. “The ascent of man would never have happened if we hadn’t learned how to manipulate water resources and adapt the earth’s carrying capacity to the needs of a thirsty agriculturally inclined species” explains Slade, who cites examples such as the ancient Mesopotamians, Persians, and the Anazasis to show that socioeconomic collapse resulting from overshoot carrying capacity ala environmental devastation is representative of a historical hallmark for civilizations generally. Just as the Mesopotamians, Persians, and Anazazi developed sophisticated methods of water management in dry environments, so have the industrialized humans which now occupy western North America.

The workings of industrial agriculture and industrial civilization as a whole are dependent on the stable and predictable Holocene climate. As such, rapid climate change spells certain economic collapse for the leviathan. *American Exodus* tracks the evolution of agriculture into its industrial format, its associated reliance on increasing technology, and its overall inherent dominate the earth, ceaseless growth mentality as the ultimate cause of current rapid global warming and oncoming collapse. Slade highlights the capacity for technology to massively impact socioecological systems by initiating requirements for unprecedented complexity and ceaseless growth.

As an important example, he discusses the Dust Bowl event that occurred across the North American southern Great Plains during the 1930s where the onset of extreme drought occurred in tandem with farmers’ embrace of a novel industrial technology; motorized field tractors which devastated the already desiccated top soil. Left without rooted vegetation for protection, when the prairie winds picked up, the remaining top soil was blown away into an insidious blizzard of flying agricultural debris. The collapse of farming communities across the plains resulting from this massive top soil loss was even harsher because it occurred during the midst of the Great Depression. Despite all this, the corporations which built tractors encouraged further socioecological destruction in order to maintain business-as-usual. As motorized tractors became “an essential tool of agriculture” farmers were forced into debt purchasing them. In order to pay off the debt they needed to produce more and further expand cultivation, which further destroyed more and more of the top soil. All this is quite familiar as a self-reinforcing feedback loop associated with collapsing agricultural civilizations historically.

Also concurrent with collapse events throughout history is the occurrence of refugee flight for new domains. The Dustbowl event forced over a million Great Plains residents to abandon their homes and seek refuge across the continent, in California, the northwest, and the northern Midwest, among other places. Similarly, throughout the latter half of the 21st century and into our current era, massive drought in Mexico's agricultural regions has been a primary mechanism driving current Mexican migrations northwards. From ancient Mesoamerica to modernity, Mexico's history seems to be case after case of civilizational induced environmental devastation paralleling economic devastation. Similar to the Oklahoman farmers during the dustbowl, Mexican farmers partaking in the green revolution mechanized their practices, but also became dependent on industrial fertilizers, pesticides, GMO seed stocks and massive water management projects. As this human forcing on the land wreaked havoc, increasing the negative effects of climate change induced drought, massive migration to the US became the only reasonable course of action for millions of Mexican agricultural workers.

Today, with ongoing and recurrent drought in 13 American states, mounting record summer temperatures, a consistent and increasing epidemic of mega-fires, people dying of heat stroke within the eternally motorized, electrified, asphalt and concrete paved city heat islands, the old and familiar climate-shift-induced-civilizational-collapse scenario is now on its way to twenty first century America.

There is no substitute for water resources. Climate change, in combination with a diminishing cryosphere across the west, will render a massive decline in carrying capacity across the US, especially the southwest, California, and the Great Plains states. With 70% of California snowpack slated to disappear by 2050, the state is set to experience a 41% reduction in its current water supply by 2100, obliterating the water needs of a massive concentration of human population. "Clearly, without additional water resources, California must either shrink its demand *or* its population" says Slade.

In the Midwest the Ogallala aquifer, which supports a region responsible for 35% of America's agricultural production, is running dry. Slade points out that in the Lakota language, Oglala means "to scatter one's own people" and posits that for these Native Americans "flight, migration, and exodus were already very old and acceptable survival strategies born of deep necessity long before climate change began to permanently dehydrate the High Plains". I would add that for the Lakota the meaning of the term Oglala goes much deeper,

rooted in ancient knowledge that settlement itself is the problem and that the eternal method of adaptation to all ecologic change, both anthropogenic and biogenic in nature, is the maintenance of a societal capacity for flight.

Slade cites data that currently 58% of refugees worldwide are victims of some type of human induced climatic or environmental change. The mass migration of some 750,000 humans which occurred over the course of a few days following hurricane Katrina represents a clear indicator of potential future scenarios in the US zone. Across America, where city power is predominately hydroelectric, blackouts could occur during the driest time periods, making air conditioning no longer an option. Pandemonium amongst a people used to living comfortable domesticated lives in artificially controlled environments in tandem with “intensifying demands on our freshwater resources [is] more likely to create wars than to reinforce social capital”, says Slade.

As treeline expands northward into the arctic tundra and forests in the US Rockies and southwest continue to desiccate, accede to pine beetle infestation, and burn up in mega-fires, as water supplies in the US mainland agricultural belts trend towards no longer being able to support sufficient agricultural output and North American agriculture moves to higher latitudes, Slade posits an inevitable northward migration for a colossal swath of American climate refugees into regions such as northern Canada, where “only 130,000 people now live in an area larger than Europe”.

“North of Oregon and Washington, the combined area of Alaska and British Columbia beckons, with about 1,000,000 square miles and vast resources of water renewed constantly by rain from the Pacific’s westerly winds. Population density in Texas has nearly reached 100 people per square mile, but in most of British Columbia...and in Alaska, the density figures are single digits. It will take several decades, but the migration I see will be definitive. The latitude and rains of America’s Northwest Coast, British Columbia, and Alaska will present a last hope to desperate people in desperate times. They will come. They will have to.”

Such a massive migration will initiate overt socioeconomic and political consequences in Canada and Alaska. Just as Mexican climate refugees are loathed today by many US citizens, substantial Canadian opposition to American refugees is expected. The Canadian federal government supposedly already has an American climate refugee

action plan in place. Meanwhile some of the politically conservative elements which dominate Alaskan society celebrate climate change and a shifting of the agricultural belt northwards as a boon to Alaska's economic future.

While migratory adaptations might save some people for the time being, Slade acknowledges that as long as the mindset of the dominant culture continues on the planet its human citizens are doomed. "*Homo humilus*, the humble human being...[is] the adaptation we need to cultivate in order to save our children from their parents' arrogance and greed. Nature may already be doing exploratory work toward eliminating ruthless economic competition from our species" he says.

Some of the writing in *American Exodus* is a bit disjointed, redundant, and lacking flow, but nonetheless Slade's topic and overall concepts are critical. Nomadic adaptations are representative of human flight from the crises we create for ourselves, but also representative of a much more enduring human legacy; a demonstration of our ability live sustainably as nomads within the ebbs and flows of ecologic change for extremely long periods of time, when moving across the land absent of an expansionist mindset focused on conquest and control.

The migratory histories associated with delayed return societies differ greatly in scope and objective than do those of immediate return societies. The delayed return conquerors and refugees both literally carried their baggage with them. As this hyper-domesticated, Manifest Destiny culture is left to colonize the north en masse, will any lessons regarding an adaptable human ecology be learned? Sadly, I find that unlikely. Even with access to new sources of freshwater and a temperate climate, it is also unlikely that the vast majority of the North American populace will survive at all without access to the fossil energy industrial system which underpins their lives today. That system, this baggage that the coming climate refugees are left with, is the very system which continues to decimate the Holocene climate: the very climate that made human habitation possible in the first place. That baggage is our baggage. And the grip on it is in our hands.

ENDNOTES

1 <http://www.kirotv.com/ap/ap/half-of-columbia-river-sockeye-salmon-dying-due-to/nm7GS/>

2 Slade, G. 2013. *American Exodus: Climate Change and the Coming Flight for Survival*. New Society Publishers

BLACK AND GREEN REVIEW

WILD EXISTENCE
PASSIONATE RESISTANCE

"CIVILIZATION IS NOT ONE LEVIATHAN
AMONG MANY. IT IS THE ONE. ITS FINAL
DECOMPOSITION IS LEVIATHAN'S END.
AFTER TWENTY CENTURIES OF STONY
SLEEP VEXED TO NIGHTMARE BY A
ROCKING CRADLE, THE SLEEPER IS
ABOUT TO WAKE TO THE CADENCES OF
A LONG-FORGOTTEN MUSIC OR TO THE
ETERNAL SILENCE OF DEATH WITHOUT
A MORROW."
- FREDY PERLMAN

BG
BG 06